SANGAM LITERATURE: ITS CULTS AND CULTURES

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PREFACE

The Tamil literature of the 'Third Sangam' is more often spoken of than actually read or used in historical reconstruction. Here is an attempt briefly to bring into prominence the cultural and religious content of this excellent body of ancient Tamil literature, and I hope readers will find it useful in understanding conditions that prevailed in the ancient Tamil country.

I was greatly helped in this study by the guidance and advice of the late Sri S. Vaiyapuri Pillai who placed the vast store of his great knowledge of this literature at my disposal. It is my regret that he has not lived to see the results of his teaching.

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CHAPTER I

SOURCES: LAND, LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Geologists hold that the Deccan and South India form the oldest part of the Indian sub-continent; some among them suppose that the Indian Ocean was at one time an extensive continent inhabited by Lemurs (Lemuria) and that Madagascar is a relic of that continent. Facts like these, however, have no bearing on the antiquity and culture of the Tamils of history, and the attempts, particularly of some scholars of the Tamil country in modern times, to connect them with the legend of the sea encroaching on land in the extreme south of India and that of the three Tamil Śangams lasting 10,000 years, are altogether misplaced and unscientific. Man might have been living in South India for some 300,000 years if not more; but for long ages he led a savage life, gathering his food as chance offered it, and was using only wooden sticks or rude stone as his implements (old stone age, Paleolithic stage). In due course he got out of this stage and learnt the use of polished stone implements as also to domesticate animals, and cultivate food crops, and this has been put at about 8000 B.C., for West Asia, as at Jericho, though it seems the general transition to food producing from food gathering habits of the New Stone (Neolithic) stage appears to have occurred in most other lands much later. The Indian Neolithic culture was essentially rooted in the Lower Deccan and had for its diagnostic elements (1) the pointed butted polished celt, auxiliary tools such as adzes, pointers, fabricators, ring stones and the like, and (2) a burnished grey pottery fabric largely handmade. The type sites are Brahmagiri, Sanganapallu, Piklihal, etc. Recent investigations of what had been called 'the ash mounds' by that indefatigable pioneer, Bruce Foote, and had been considered by him as essentially related to the Neolithic people, have revealed that the earliest advent of pastoral, agricultural pottery-producing, pecked-and-ground basaltic tool using man—the modern man of most ancient India—would have already moved about in the Lower Deccan 4,000 years ago and had regular cattle pens and systematized method of burning away the accumulated cattle dung in heaps which, in their present fossilised state, have dotted the Lower

Deccan country side as the ash mounds 'būḍidi-dibbahs' in local parlance. It is from this stage that he developed into the Polished-stone-axe stage, and inevitably, in due course, he came into contact with the Chalcolithic cultures of the Upper Deccan moving southwards and came to acquire copper metallurgical usage and painted pottery. He ceased then to be Neolithic man and was well on the way to semi-urban life and pursuits.

Whether the Tamils of history were the descendants of these Neolithic people or immigrants into South India as another stock from abroad, is not easy to determine. Writers have now and again sought to establish that the fairly advanced urban culture of the Indus Valley was essentially Dravidian in its make-up and that the writings on the numerous seals belonging to that culture carry inscriptions in a proto-Dravidian language. There have also been others in recent times who were inclined to hold that the inscriptions are in an Indo-Aryan idiom and that the culture is closely allied to Vedic Culture if not actually part of it. The fact is that no confident conclusions can be reached till the writing on the seals is satisfactorily deciphered and a general consensus emerges as to the nature and content of these inscriptions. The question is, however, becoming more complicated by the latest anthropological studies of the skeletal remains from Harappa, etc., whereby the dual conclusion, tentative though and empirical, has been arrived (a) that in sum, the Harappans of Punjab were nearer ethnically to the modern Sikhs, the Harappans of Sind to the modern Sindhis, and of Gujarat to the modern Gujaratis; and (b) that there is at least a notable Indo-Aryan cranial element in the cemeteries of Harappa. The full impact of these opinions has yet to be assessed in relation to other material evidence. The megalithic sites in the Deccan and South India, and the philological study of the names of places and peoples, add to the totality of the picture by seeming to make out that the Tamils may have migrated to, and settled in South India from West Asian or the East Mediterranean region by sea as well as by land. Evidence from Ādichanallūr on the Tāmbraparṇi river in Tirunelveli District seems to be important, but has not been fully studied yet. There are urn-burials here, but no megalithic monuments; but the presence of black and red pottery ware and iron implements brings the site into close relation with the

megalithic sites of South India, but the pottery in Ādichanallūr is more primitive than in the megalithic monuments. There are also found here on the one hand bronze ware and gold diadems which together with iron tridents find typological parallels in Palestine of about 1200 B.C. as also in Syria and Cyprus, and on the other painted potsherds and stray monoliths which seems to tell much of their earlier career in Northern India. The people of Ādichanallūr cultivated rice. Subject to confirmation by further research, it seems a fair assumption that perfected rice-cultivation and funerary practices, particularly megalithis, entered South India with the Tamil (Dravidian) speaking peoples who must, of course, have mixed a great deal with pre-existing folk as they did later with the incoming Indo-Aryans from North India. Some date round about 300 B.C. has been suggested for the arrival of this iron using megalithic people on the evidence of stratigraphy in Brahmagiri (Mysore), Maski (Raichur) and other places, and 800 B.C. as the earliest possible date for the first occupation of Brahmagiri. As against the earlier view that Dravidian speech covered the whole of India when the Aryans entered it, present opinion is more inclined to the view that the area of this speech was never much greater in extent than at the present time and that the evidence of Dravidian impact elsewhere such as the Brahui of Baluchistan must be accounted for as the result of prehistoric migrations by land or by sea, or of contacts in historical times. But it would be well to stress the fact that the problems briefly touched on here are very complex, and the time for formulating definite conclusions is not yet come. The important point to be borne in mind, however, is that the antiquity of the use of iron in India has now been pushed back, by archaeological evidence, into the very beginning of the 1st Millennium B.C. if not slightly earlier, and adjustments for further diffusion of this potent techno-cultural factor of urban growth have to be made all over the country for early iron using contexts.

The evidence of archaeology in South India has so far yielded no support to the idea of a developed and prosperous material culture flourishing in Dravidian India before the advent of the Aryans. Caldwell's study of the languages of the South enabled him to discover 'a faithful picture of the simple life of the non-Aryanized Dravidians' and to claim only 'that the elements of civilization

already existed among them'. Most undoubtedly there was a great mingling of people and the clearest evidence of it is afforded in the earliest strata of Tamil literature now accessible to us—the Sangam literature as it is generally known.

The short Tamil inscriptions engraved in the Brahmi script in several rocks and caverns mainly in the southern Tamil districts dating from about the first century B.C. to third century A.D., show that the Tamil script and language are still in a formative stage though they have already felt the impact of nothern influences, and thus go far to confirm the chronology of cultural growth suggested here.

In ancient times the hill of Vēṅgadam (Tirupati) was the recognized limit of the Tamil country in the north, and the West Coast was included in it as well as a good part of what now forms the Mysore State. Jutting into the Indian Ocean in the midst of the monsoon area it commanded a favourable situation for trade with lands both to the west and east. The Eastern Ghats striking southwestwards about the latitude of Madras to form the edge of the Mysore plateau and meet the Western Ghats in the Nilgiris, and the southern half of the Western Ghats which reach great heights of over 8,000 feet in the Ānaimalai together with their offshoots, form the chief mountain features. The Palghat gap measuring twenty miles north to south forms the only considerable break in the Western Ghats affording easy communications between the broad Carnatic plain and the narrow coast strip of Malabar; the much narrower Shencottah and Ārāmbōli passes in the south facilitate intercourse between the district of Tirunelvely and Travancore. The Western Ghats are rich in teak and other valuable products like bamboo, rosewood and ironwood, and elephants abound in their forests. The high rainfall and humidity of the West Coast is very favourable to the cultivation of pepper and coconuts; betel and talipat are other commercial products of the Malabar Coast. The inlets and backwaters of the West Coast facilitate internal communication in the north-south direction and add to the picturesqueness of the coastal country. The relative political isolation of this coast from the rest of the land is in striking contrast with its active contact by sea with the nations of the outside world from very early times.

The Periyār is the only important river on this coastal strip. The Pālār, Peṇṇār, Kāvērī and Vaigai are the principal rivers, all flowing into the Bay of Bengal, and the plain country irrigated by these rivers is the real old India of the south, the land of historic kingdoms and their capitals, of numberless temples and of indigenous arts of almost prehistoric antiquity. The Kāvērī is also known as Ponni, the Lady of Gold, celebrated in song and legend by the grateful poets and people of the land which owes all its prosperity to her fertilising waters. Artificial irrigation in the Kāvērī valley is perhaps as old as agriculture itself. The mouth of the Tāmbraparṇi is famous for the pearl fisheries of the Gulf of Mannar, often described at length by travellers from other lands. The level of the East Coast has changed in historical times. Koṟkai and Kāyal on the Tirunelvely coast were one after the other flourishing ports between the 1st and 13th centuries A. D., but are now almost buried under sand dunes and are some miles inland.

From the dawn of history the Chēra, Chōla and Pāṇḍya monarchies were the chief political powers in South India, and these are mentioned in the inscriptions of Aśoka as independent neighbours of the Mauryan empire, along with Satiyaputas who have been identified with the Adigaimāns of ancient Tamil literature. Tradition conferred the name Chōla country on the area bounded on the north and south by two streams of the same name Veḷḷār, the northern Veḷḷār entering the sea near Porto Novo and the southern passing through the Pudukottai taluq in the Trichi District ; to the west it extended up to Kōṭṭaikkarai, the traces of the strong embankment of which still remain in the Kulittalai taluq of the Trichinopoly District. The territory to the south of the Chōla kingdom up to Cape Comorin was the Pāṇḍya country while the areas to the west and north of Chōla-maṇḍalam were known as Koṅgu and Toṇḍaināḍu respectively. On the West Coast, Quilon and all south of it formed part of the Pāṇḍya country, the original Chēra country comprising Koṅgu Nāḍu (Coimbatore and parts of Trichinopoly District), north Travancore, Cochin and South Malabar. Chēra rule was extended by early conquests into the interior up to the Kollimalai in Salem on the traditional borders of the Chōla kingdom.

Uṟaiyūr, now a suburb of Trichinopoly on the south bank of the Kāvērī, was the Chōla capital, and Kāvēripaṭṭanam at the mouth of that river its chief port. The tiger was the Chōla emblem. The Pāṇḍyas had their capital at Madura on the Vaigai, and their emblem was a double-carp. Koṟkai and Śāliyūr were their chief ports on the east, while Nelcynda (Niraṇam) and Balita (Viḻiñam) served them on the west. The site of Vanji, the Chera capital, has been much debated by modern scholars, some locating it near Muziris (Cranganore) at the mouth of the Periyār, but higher up the stream, while others identify it with the inland city Karūr on the Amarāvatī river in the Coimbatore District. The Chēras had the *aṅkuśa* (elephant-goad) and bow and arrow for their emblem. Muziris was their chief port, but there were many others, e.g., Toṇḍi (Kadaluṇḍi), Marandai (unidentified), Naravu (Naura and Nitrias of the Greek writers) farther north, and Bakare (Porkad) in the South. It is doubtful if the Pallavas who ruled from Kāñchī at least from the sixth century A.D. were the descendants of the Toṇḍaimāns who were ruling from the same capital earlier; the earliest seaports of Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam we hear of are Sōpatma (Maṟkāṇam) and Poduke (Pondicherry).

The first tangible account of the Tamil kingdoms, their rulers, polity and culture, and their trade, is found in the earliest stratum of Tamil literature and in the works of European writers of the first and second centuries of the Christian era, particularly Pliny the Elder, the anonymous author of the *Pariplus of the Erythrean Sea*, and Ptolemy. All that has survived of Śangam literature comprises about 33,000 lines of poetry included in eight achematic anthologies *(Eṭṭuttogai)* and another collection called *Ten Idylls (Pattuppāṭṭu)*. The names of nearly 500 poets including a number of princes and women are known and the poems vary in length from three lines to over 800 apiece. The *Silappadikāram* and *Maṇimēkalai* are sometimes mentioned as early Tamil works; but they differ from these very much in vocabulary and structure, and quite obviously belong to a later age. On the other hand, the *Tolkāppiyam*, the earliest extant Tamil grammar, is much nearer the Śangam period. The Śangam literature is marked by a directness

and human interest rare in later times, and furnishes many vivid pictures of social and economic life, rural and urban; the poets are equally at home in describing the royal palace, the Brahmin home and the fisherman's hut. The most dominant feature of the poems is the composite nature of the culture they depict, in which Aryan, Sanskritic, or Northern elements have become inextricably mingled with the earlier indigenous culture. The fusion appears to have been quite natural and voluntary, and there is no evidence of social disharmony. The Vedic religion of sacrifices, temple worship and festivals, Jainism and Buddhism, all flourished side by side with primitive forms of worship practised by the hunters, shepherds, fishermen and other folk, often accompanied by folk music and dances. One poem affirms, for instance, that there are only four castes *(kuḍi)* viz., *tuḍiyan, pāṇan, paṛaiyan* and *kaḍamban* and only one god worthy of being worshipped by paddy being strewn before him. These castes and this worship were doubtless of very great antiquity, possibly survivals from pre-Aryan times. On the other hand, the poems are replete with ideas and expressions of Sanskrit origin, and the entire scheme of the religion and ethics, the myths and sociology of ancient Hinduism are seem to be at the command of these early poets. The three royal families of the Tamil country alike sought to establish some connection with the Mahābhārata war. The Chēras, for instance, claim that their ancestors fed in lavish profusion the mighty combatant forces that had assembled at Kurukshetra.

For a reconstruction of the political history of the Tamil kingdoms in this period, however, the poems offer little help. There is no lack of the names of kings, princes, and chieftains, but, except for the Chēras for whom we get from the *Padiṛṛupattu* (Ten Tens) the genealogy of two collateral lines for three or four generations, we have no information on the genealogical or chronological relations among them. Men, scenes, and incidents stand out sometimes in powerful pen pictures, but there is no means of assigning their proper places in a continuous story. Among the Chēras perhaps the most prominent name is that of *Śeṅguṭṭuvan.* He is said to be a contemporary of Gajabāhu of Ceylon who, according to the *Śilappadikāram*, co-operated with the Chēra monarch in establishing the cult of

Pattini, the chaste wife. That poem is best looked upon as the handling of an old popular saga which, like the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki, threw into oblivion earlier version of the story of Kōvalan and his wife Kaṇṇaki, the model of chastity. The part assigned to Śeṅguṭṭuvan and his contemporaries in the institution of the cult may well have been historical. Śeṅguṭṭuvan was a great soldier and interfered in the politics of the Chōla country to secure the throne for one prince whose claims were contested by nine others who were defeated and slain in the battle of Vāyil or Nērivayil near Uṟaiyūr. A younger contemporary of Śeṅguṭṭuvan was the famous Chōla monarch Karikāla who as a youth was kept out of his rights and thrown into prison, and took the throne after inflicting a crushing defeat on his foes in a battle of Kōvil-Veṇṇi near Tanjore. He was great in war and peace, and under him the Chōla kingdom gained the hegemony of the Tamil States. He became the hero of two of the *Ten Idylls* and of many colourful legends of later times recorded in literature and epigraphy. One of Karikāla's contemporaries was Toṇḍaimān Iḷandiraiyan who ruled at Kachchi or Kāñchīpuram and was celebrated in one of the *Ten Idylls*. Some time later than Karikāla came another famous ruler of the age, the Pāṇḍya Neḍuñjeḷiyan, the hero of two other poems in the *Ten Idylls*. Called to the throne as young lad, he had to face an invasion of his kingdom by almonst all his neighbours, whose cupidity had been roused by the prospect of plunder. He met the foes almost at the gates of Madura, whence he chased them far into the north, and finally dispersed them after a pitched battle at Talaiyālaṅgānam, near Tiruvārūr in the Tanjore District. Under him the Pāṇḍyas became the chief power in the land.

By the side of the kingdoms, there were a number of chieftaincies, most of them under Vēḷir, who claimed a legendary origin from the fire pit of a northern sage and some connection with the Yādava family of Śrī Krishṇa. Prominent among them were the Adigan of South Mysore and Salem with Tagaḍūr (Dharmapuri in Salem) as his capital, Nannan of Tulunāḍ, Malaiyamān of the hill country round Tirukkōvalūr in South Arcot, Pēhan of the Paḻani hills, Pāri of Parambanāḍ round Pirānmalai in the Pāṇḍya Country and Āy of the Podiya hill in the extreme south. The kings and chieftains vied with

one another in the patronage of the arts and letters, and there were bands of roving minstrels and dancers, men and women, who kept moving from place to place exhibiting their talents and being more or less well rewarded for their exertion.

Brāhmī inscriptions in rocks and natural caverns slightly improved by art attest the presence of Buddhist and Jain monks in these secluded dwellings spread over different parts of the country; most of these inscriptions are later than the age of Aśoka. We hear little of these faiths in Śaṅgam literature, while the *Śilappadikāram* and *Maṇimēkalai* are full of references to them. The authors of these works, like other Tamil writers of the time, professed one or other of these faiths. A certain Accutavikkanta of the Kaḷabbakula was ruling the Chōla country late in the fifth or early in the sixth century A. D., and in his reign Buddhist monasteries and authors enjoyed patronage. Accuta was doubtless a member of the mysterious clan of Kaḷabhras. The overthrow of Kaḷabhra rule in the latter half of the sixth century was the first step in the revival of the power of the Pallavas and Pāṇḍyas, while the Chōlas did not emerge from obscurity till the middle of the ninth century A. D.

For three centuries after the fall of the Kaḷabhras, the Tamil country proper was divided between kings of the Pāṇḍya and Pallava dynasties who had Madura and Kāñchī for their respective capitals. They engaged in more or less constant wars and the boundary between their kingdoms shifted north and south of the Kāvērī according to the exigencies of war. The Pallavas had to fight on two fronts, for besides the Pāṇḍyas in the south, they had enemies from across the Tuṅgabhadrā to contend with, at first the Chāḷukyas of Bādāmi (A.D. 550–750) and later the Rāṣṭrakūṭas of Mānyakheṭa (Malkhed in the 'Hyderabad State'). The enemies of the Pallavas were the natural allies of the Pāṇḍyas, while the rulers of Ceylon as the neighbours of the Pāṇḍyas were more inclined to be on the side of the Pallavas.

War and politics apart, the period is remarkable for a widespread religious revival; this revival brought about the glorification of many

shrines dedicated to Śiva and Viṣṇu, and the rise of a popular devotional literature which has remained the most precious heritage of the Tamils. Equally striking were the advances registered in the domains of architecture, sculpture and painting, besides music, dance and drama, particularly under the Pallavas.

Of the first three kings of the Páṇḍya revival we know little besides their names and titles, viz., Pāṇḍyādhirāja Kaḍuṅgōn (A.D. 590-620), Māṟavarman Avaniśūḷamaṇi (620-645) and Śeḻiyan Vānavan Śēndan or Jayantavarman (645-670). The *adhirāja* title of the first king shows that some subordinate rulers acknowledged his suzerainty, and Śēndan must have gained success in wars against the Chēras before he assumed the title Vānavan.

We are, however, better informed about the contemporary Pallava rulers of Kāñchī. Simhaviṣṇu (576-600), the founder of the line, ruled over the entire country between the Krishna and the Kāvērī and assumed the title Avanisimha (lion of the earth). He was a worshipper of Viṣṇu and his portrait with those of two of his queens has been sculptured in relief in the Ādi Varāha cave temple at Māmallapuram. His son Mahendravarman I (600-630) was a versatile genius and must be counted among the most interesting figures of history. He was soldier, poet, musician, architect and religious reformer. His victory at Puḷḷalūr against the formidable invader Chāḷukya Pulakēśin II saved his capital, though it did not lead to the recovery of the northern provinces occupied by the enemy. One may have to mention here the Paḷḷankōil grant of Simhaviṣṇu attesting the existence of Jina Kāñchī already then, the identity of the places Perunagar and Veṇkunṟam in the neighbouring tract of Chingleput District and also the conventional *Praśasti* form already existing in 6th century in Tamilnāḍ. This record is the earliest indubitable Tamil record we have. The language of the record shows refinement. Mahendravarman deprecated extreme and corrupt religious practices and he turned the laugh against Kāpālikās, Pāśupatās and Buddhist *Bhikṣus* in the pleasant farce *Mattavilāsa* which is remarkably free from the intensity of sectarian feeling that was growing up around him. He introduced into the Tamil country the practice of scooping *maṇḍapa* type of temples out of live rock and gloried in his ability to raise

shrines without the use of brick, timber, metal or mortar. Among the many titles he adopted perhaps the most characteristic are *guṇabhara* and *vicitra-citta*. In his time the Pallava country must have had close cultural and trade relations with the Hindu Colonies in the East and the title Mahēndravarman assumed by the contemporary king of Kāmbuja (Chitrasena) was obviously not a chance coincidence.

The Śaṅgam literary works, as we know them today, on a consensus of all the available data and on an unbiassed critical estimate belong to a period extending upto the 5th century A.D. Indeed the word 'Śaṅgam' is itself of comparatively late currency in this context. These classics were in olden times known by the collective implication of the terms *Pāṭṭu* and *Tokai* (Songs and Anthologies) and indeed the ten works of the former category and the eight of the latter are alone deserving representing the core of the 'Saṅgam' classics. *Śilappadikāram* and its sequel *Maṇimēkalai* are later works.

The eighteen later classics which are not of the Śaṅgam fabric, go under the name of *Padineṇ-Kīḻ kaṇakku*. It is among these that the famous ('Aphorisms' or) *Tirukkuṟaḷ* of Tiruvaḷḷuvar is found. The earlier commentators had clearly left out of mention *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, while dealing with the Śaṅgam classics, and correspondingly the authors of the eighteen later classics were called 'the later noble ones' by the famous commentator Naccinārkkiniyar; there are points in favour of treating these eighteen works as post Śaṅgam in age and matrix. They, however, precede *Śilappadikāram* and *Maṇimēkalai* which are taken as the Tamil epics.

Even among the 'Songs and Idylls', the works of *Kalittogai*, *Paripāḍal* and *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaḍai* are sometimes taken as post Śaṅgam compositions. The basis of this reasoning is the greater simplicity, evolved grammar and richer assimilation of Sanskrit words in the latter. Be this as it may, we note that the first mentioned (*Kalittogai*) would seem to have been the work of one and the same person while the second (*Paripāḍal*) is interesting on two counts: firstly that it contains stanzas on Viṣṇu, Muruga, Kāḷi (or ocean as it sometimes taken) and Vaigai river; and secondly by the fact that each stanza contains in its colophon the name of its author, the name of the musician who set it to music and the melody to which it

is set. The last mentioned *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaḍai* is ascribed to the authorship of the famous Nakkīrar who was the author of *Neḍunal-vāḍai*—the Śaṅgam classic.

To be added to these as the legitimate outgrowth of the literary spurt is *Tolkāppiyam,* the grammatical treatise of the Śaṅgam era. Some hold that this work should be taken as considerably antedating the Śaṅgam works ; this could well be disputed ; but the tremendous importance of the grammar for fully appreciating the literary usages of the Śaṅgam poets cannot be overemphasised.

A matter also of some significance here is the fact that irrespective of the character of the Śaṅgam classics by way of subject matter, rhetoric and metrics, the invocatory stanzas in them were compositions under a single authorship, apparently pertaining to the time when the Śaṅgam anthologies were compiled. They are not to be treated alongside the Śaṅgam works themselves. For instance, the famous Perundēvanār who created the Tamil *Bhāratam*, had composed the invocatory verses for the Śaṅgam classics *Ahanānūṟu, Puṟanānūru, Kuṟuntogai, Naṟṟiṇai and Aiṅguṟunūṟu.*

The commentaries to the Śaṅgam classics would seem to belong to mediaeval times. These commentaries, however, are, in bulk, works of considerable merit and are succinct and specific in their elucidation of the ancient traditions, handed down orally among teachers and disciples and it would have been virtually impossible for one to understand and reconstruct the literary structure and import of ancient Tamil without the guidance so effectively provided by these commentators. At the same time, it is patent that they cannot possess the same indelible format that, for instance, rock epigraphs and copper plate grants have, but had been subject to alterations, modifications and aberrations successively at the hands of the compilers, scribes and even the scholars who learnt them by rote as well as from cudjan leaves. It is on this score there is a Tamil proverb that 'the scribe spoiled the manuscript, and the scholar violated the text'.

The Tamil country, language and people mentioned in the Śaṅgam classics essentially connote the geographical division of the peninsula

bound on the north by Tirupati hills (Vēṅgaḍam) and on the south by Kumari cape. The sea board on the west and east across which Tamil was evenly spread at that ancient period had not necessitated the specific mention of the eastern or western boundary of Tamilnāḍ. Although some of the poets of *Puṟam* (17 : 1–2), *Maduraikkāñii* (71–71), *Padiṟṟuppattu* (11 : 23–25 and 43 : 6–8) had also mentioned the Himalayas as the northern limit they are all agreed that the Kumari cape formed the southern limit. We have, by implication, not only to reject any theory that talks of a land south of the cape, but also to consider that north of Tirupati hills, it would have been conventionally accepted in ancient times that the spoken language changed. The people beyond Tirupati hills were called the Vaḍukar, generally ascribable to the Andhras (*Naṟṟiṇai* 212 : 5-6 ; *Aham* 213 : 3-8 ; *Aham* 295 : 13 and 18 ; and *Kuṟuntogai* 11 : 5–8). In the *Aham* passage mentioned above last, we have a reference to Pullikuṉṟam which is a synonym for Vēṅgaḍam or Tirupati hills. The Pulli mentioned here was a local chieftain and was perhaps identical with the Kaḷabhra (or Kaḷavara) chief of that name known otherwise. Beyond his tract lay the 'Vaḍugu' or Andhra country. The *Kuṟuntogai* passage quoted above mentions a Kaṭṭi who was apparently a Gaṅga chieftain and his tract and the Vaḍugu region are indicated as having different languages.

The word 'Tamiḻ' mentioned by the Śaṅgam writers as well as the later commentators would certainly be construed as the sole language of the Tamil country notwithstanding the fact that 'Śaṅgam Tamiḻ' has become today rather obsolete in its usage and etymology; and we have come a long way evolving from it. Indeed even *Tolkāppiyam* tackles this issue and specifies that the country around Madurai ruled by the Pāṇḍyas spoke the finest or deluxe Tamil (*Sen Tamiḷ*) while the twelve remaining tracts of Tamilnāḍ would have had regional usages which have been categorized as provincialisms using '*Koḍum Tamiḷ*' or hard Tamil by other traditions. We have it also on the authority of the commentator Naccinārkkiniyar (a native of Madurai) in his commentary on *Thirumurugāṟṟuppaḍai* that the great Tamil poetess Avvai has praised the Pāṇḍyan country as wielding the best Tamil. Further Tolkāppiyar himself refers at many places to usage (*vaḷakku*) and textual form ('*Seyyul*') thereby indicating that as

now in all languages, written Tamil would have been different from the spoken Tamil. At the same time the fact that in the wake of a desire to have felicity of expression in easily understandable forms, the ancient poets, as mentioned by Tolkāppiyar, used *chēri* tongue or the speech of the laity, would clearly prove that these admixtures of the common usages of the people in textual Tamil was not viewed with scorn, in ancient times. When we realise that there had been such an intimate contact of even northern folk in the Tamil country, bringing together Vedic rituals and customs, which are actually extolled in many Śaṅgam passages, we may take it that there was a free intercourse on all planes between the local people and outsiders. Poets freely employed the loan words and even fully imbibed the specific connotations and nuances of the loan words in their application. This has been specifically commended and admitted into the vocabularial fold for poetry by Tolkāppiyar. A few Śaṅgam verses also explain how the local mahouts of Tamilnāḍ when training the elephants imbued them not only with the northern tongue (namely Sanskrit) but also mixed dialects.

The presence of even foreigners from beyond the shores of India, is well attested in the Śaṅgam works. They are found, in pursuit of trade, settled in seaport towns and even found employed as body-guards, amazon gate keepers and for watch and ward in the cities at night. These Graeco-Roman Yavanas are called ' Mlēcchas. Their enviably muscular and hefty physique and the tight tunics they wore on their person (*meippai*), the dagger thrust across their belts and their strong footwear are all duly described (*Mullai* 60–61, 64–66 ; *Maduraikkāñji* : 31–32 ; *Perum*, 69–75). Particular mention is made of the fact that the Yavanas, owing to their unfamiliarity with Tamil language, try to supplement their poor powers of expression by eloquent body movements and gesticulations and facial emotions. The commentator Naccinārkkiniyar gives even a fanciful but none too inappropriate interpretation of the word ' tongue tied ' by saying that these Mlēccha palace guards would have been actually drunk or selected so. Not only as palace guards but even as mercenaries in the army of the Tamil kings these Yavanas served, in the company of men speaking many tongues.

The eighteen regiments consisting of many hundreds of infantrymen are referred to in *Puṟam* (62 : 10-11). All these are intended mainly to suggest that the 'Śaṅgam' era saw the purposeful impact, coalescence and assimilation of many languages and customs into the Tamil fabric.

The chief patrons of Tamil culture and lore were undoubtedly the three kings of the Chēra, Pāṇḍya and Chōla terrains. They are thus often mentioned together and indeed Tamilnāḍ itself is called 'the world of the three' (*Puṟam* 357 : 2). Under these famous trio were many local chiefs and munificent private patrons. The royal trio as well as the smaller vassal chiefs were themselves no mean intellectualls.

We have outstanding Pāṇḍyan kings like Iḷamperu Vaḻuti, Nalvaḻuti, Perum Kaḍuṅgō; Neḍuñceḻiyan, Bhūtapāṇḍyan and Arivuḍai Nambi, who were composers of poetry of considerable merit. Of the Chōlas, similarly, we have Nalluruttiram, Chōla Kiḷḷivaḷavan. Of the Chēras, again, Chēramān Kaṇaikkāl Irumpoṟai who had gone down in histroy and tradition as having disdained to take even water in captive state under the Chōla Ceṅgaṇān and who had sung in strains of high self-respect and unbending dignity. Of lesser chiefs, we have such celebrated exemplars of magnanimity and munificence like Pāri, Kāri, Ōri, Pēkan, Āy, Adiyamān, Naḷḷi who have been deservedly recalled by grateful Tamil people as the 'last seven patrons.'

Like the deep rooted tradition of triple Kingdoms, triple kings, we have also in popular parlance, the triple Tamil lore, namely Prose, Poetry and Drama. *Paripāḍal* (4) mentions such a classification of early Tamil literature. We are aware that the Śaṅgam era did certainly find the Tamils familiar with harp, lyre, drum, etc., with which Pāṇas sang poems, and also dancers and players who entertained the kings and common folk alike by their histrionics. A Chēra king Āṭṭanatti is mentioned as a renowned player. Of course, many of the musical compositions of the Śaṅgam era have now been lost to us, except for *Paripāḍal*.

The main sentiments involved in most of the Śaṅgam works are romantic love and heroic war exploits. It is the Tamil tradition to designate the transactions connected with love as *Aham* and those of external happenings like war as *Puṛam*. *Aham* is essentially treating about domestic and intimate personal affairs of social life. In order that social life might not be in danger of disruption or disintegration, it was necessary to establish peace in the countryside. It was considered as part of one's bounden duty to preserve the land from enemy attacks. A *Puṛam* song (312) mentions how it is the father's obligation to beget a son and the son's to jump sword in hand into battle and killing the enemy elephants to return victorious. Indeed, the Śaṅgam poets provided, among the classified list of reasons for the separation of the lover and the beloved, for the departure on royal command to the war front. This was called *vēndu vinaippirivu*. Citizens considered it meritorious to lead a heroic life and to be wounded in battle in defence of one's land, king and culture.

Of the eight anthologies (*Togais*) five deal almost mainly with love, contributing nearly 1850 verses to this. Even of the ' ten songs ' the more extensive compositions, namely, *Mullaippāṭṭu*, *Kuriñjippāṭṭu* and *Neḍunal-vāḍai* deal with love: *Puṛanānūṛu* and *Paduṛṛippattu* deal with heroism, comprising 500 verses in all. *Paripāḍal* has some contributions on divinities although it is also not devoid of the sentiment of love.

Śaṅgam poets have placed great emphasis upon the beauties of nature. They have thus diligently cultivated a sense of realism and the charge of exaggeration cannot be laid at their door when the subject matter is nature. Truth, beauty and goodness receive full attention at their hands in their emotional expressions. They have fully utilized faunal, floral and bird life data around them and systematised their provenances to a remarkable degree, in the five-fold classification of the terrain to which we would be reverting in great detail at a later stage. This reveals their essentially scientific attitude in secular literature and documentation.

They have, to a great extent, made up for the absence of more tangible records of ancient life like epigraphy and archaeological

antiquities and should be looked upon as highly veracious literary accounts regarding the subjects to which they address themselves. It is needless to say, that as literary products, they evince a very high degree of excellence, pregnant with suggestive import, having a brevity of style and directness of expression, a variety of rhetorical forms and above all a close rapport with nature and man's innermost feelings and instincts. They form the most precious heritage of the early Tamils.

The way in which the Śaṅgam poems are systematised would imply that they have been approved by a regular academy which had laid down the prosodic trends for different types of literary works. The metrical differences form the basis of the classification of compositions. We have, unfortunately, no full information regarding the compilers of each of the groups of compositions in the Śaṅgam anthologies, although we do have references to quite a few. One of the manuscripts of the *Ten Idylls* refers to the number of works contained under this major head. But, as we have already mentioned, the term *Ten Idylls* is itself of a relatively much later usage, and the earliest vogue is that of calling whatever fell under these categories as simply '*Pāṭṭu*' and '*Togai*' and not *Pattupāṭṭu* (*Ten Idylls*) and *Eṭṭuttogai* (eight anthologies). This would imply that, even of the ten compositions enumerated above, some would have been included in this early Śaṅgam group, at a later time.

Although the *Ten Idylls* is an anthology of 10 different compositions, it is not a connected group like *Kuṟuntogai* or *Puṟanānūṟu*, having a common sentiment and background for the entire stretch. They have been composed at different chronological intervals and had been individually in currency and later brought together. Half of the *Ten Idylls* are of the *Āṟṟuppaḍai* type, while *Mullai*, *Kuṟiñiippāṭṭu* and *Paṭṭinappālai* deal with the customs of the domestic life of three physiographic regions. *Neḍunalvāḍai*, although it is dealing much with '*Aham*' type of sentiment, is included in '*Puṟam*' group by some commentators because it mentions Pāṇḍyan King's floral cognomen, namely, 'margosa flower.' *Maduraikkāñji* is a special type called '*Kāñji*' which treates about the various transient elements of this world and leads to striving for immortality,

though yet coming broadly under the '*Puṛam*' category. It is the largest composition among the *Ten Idylls* containing 782 lines while the smallest of this series is *Mullaippāṭṭu*, containing barely 103 lines.

At the end of each individual composition occur the names of the poet who composed it and the patron in whose inspiration they were composed. In some rare cases, as in *Paṭṭinappālai* and *Malaipaḍukaḍām*, we have references to these details of authorship and patronage from later literature and even in inscriptions. In the former case, the reference is found in a Tiruveḷḷaṟi inscription. This incidentally refers to the inauguration of this composition in a pavilion by the author Kaṇṇan (Uruttirankaṇṇanār) and says that in a later battle the whole city was destroyed excepting the 16 pillared pavilion where this inauguration took place. This is a testimony to the high sense of regard for monuments associated with poets and poetry, even at the hands of an invading king. Similarly a Tiruvaṇṇāmalai record mentions Nannan, the royal patron and '*Kaḍām*' (*Malaipaḍukadām*) the composition under reference.

We cannot overestimate the utility of *Tolkāppiyam* for a proper comprehension of the literary merits of the Śaṅgam classics. We have no firm information yet about grammatical works that could be earlier than *Tolkāppiyam*. Commentators of mediaeval times do refer to some other works which were composed along with *Tolkāppiyam*.

The most important source of information about *Tolkāppiyam* is the special poem of appreciation by Panampāranār known as *Śiṛappu pāyiram*. We have also other collections of verses and stray songs on this work. We know further many hearsay items of information about it from the mediaeval commentators like Iḷampūraṇar, Pērāśiriyar, Naccinārkkiniyar and others. The internal evidence from the work itself supplies many data on it. It is considered as the grammar of the 'song' (*Pāṭṭu*) and anthology ('*Togai*') group composing the Śaṅgam works. It is very compact and comprehensive in its contents and axioms. It is best considered as having immediately and closely succeeded the earlier among Śaṅgam works. Panampāranār who gave the '*Śiṛappu pāyiram*' for *Tolkāppiyam* is included as one of the poets in the *Kuṛuntogai* group.

Thus we may rest assured that *Tolkāppiyam* forms part of the closing stages of the Śaṅgam classics. It is interesting to note that the "*Āṛṛuppaḍai*" groups of the "Ten song" category of Śaṅgam works fully substantiate the grammatical rules laid down by *Tolkāppiyam* and would thus be considered as accepting it as their grammatical base.

I propose to deal with the detailed consideration of the wealth of sociological, cultural and cult data that are thrown up by the Śaṅgam literature in the succeeding chapter.

APPENDIX

It would be appropriate at this stage to compile the basic data about the main compositions of the Śaṅgam period, the information regarding the length, metre, patron, poet and broad import of each of these, so that there ensues a greater familiarity with their pāttern. Further, it would be of statistical value for purposes of ready reference to workers on Śaṅgam classics.

A. *The Pattu-p-pāṭṭu group*

I. *Tirumurugāṟṟuppaḍai*

1. Poet — Nakkīrar
2. Patron — Unknown King.
3. Metre — *Āśiriyappā*
4. Length — 317 lines.
5. Topic — Deals with the six hill

abodes of Muruga, namely, Tirupparaṅkunṟam, Tirucchendūr, Tiruvēragam, Tiruvāvinankuḍi (Paḻani), Kunṟutorāḍal and Paḻamudir Sōlai. The last two do not refer to any specific spot. The poem describes Muruga's birth, his flower, creeper, vehicles, his destruction of Krauñcha hill, killing of Śūrapadma and the methods of his worship.

II. *Poṟunarāṟṟuppaḍai.*

1. Muḍattamakkaṇṇiyār.
2. Karikāl Peruvaḷattān Chōla.
3. 248 lines.
4. *Āśiriyappā*
5. This deals with the musical mendicant Porunar tribe who are experts in different kinds of music and play on *Pālai* harp. It describes completely the personality of the player, the glory and munificence of Chōla king Karikāl Peruvaḷattān, etc.

III. *Śiṟupāṇāṟṟuppaḍai.*

1. Nallūr Naṭṭattaṉār of Iḍaikaḻināḍu.
2. Nalliyakkōḍan of Ōymānāḍu (Modern South Arcot Dist.)
3. *Āśiriyappā.*
4. 269 lines.
5. Deals with *Pāṇas*, the musical mendicants ; in this case it was an expert on harp (*yāḷ*) and as he uses *Śiṟi yāḷ* (small harp) he is called Śiṟupāṇa, Here again the descriptions of Vañji, Koṟkai, Madurai and Uṟaiyūr, the exploits of the seven munificent patrons (Ēḻuvaḷḷalkaḷ), the routes that the *pāṇa* followed in his itinerary.

IV. *Perumpāṇāṟṟuppaḍai.*

1. Kaḍiyalūr Uruttiraṅkaṇṇanār
2. Toṇḍaimān Iḷantirayan of Kacci.
3. *Āśiriyappā*
4. 500 lines,
5. It deals with the harp, the justice of martial and pastoral folk, peasants, fishermen etc., houses of Brahmins, hermitages of ascetics, lighthouses, glory of city of Kāñchī, Anantaśāyi Viṣṇu enshrined near Kāñchī, Iḷantirayan's valour, magnanimity, the hospitality of the different castes in the land etc.

V. *Mullai-p-pāṭṭu.*

1. Nappūḍanār, son of a goldsmith of Kavērippaṭṭinam.
2. King unknown (probably Chōla)
3. *Āśiriyappā.*
4. 103 lines.
5. It deals with the love pangs in separation (*Vipralambha Śriṅgāra*). The lover going to battle, description of the garrison, elder ladies pacifying the beloved, heroic exploits, king's victorious return at the very beginning of monsooṇ

season, monsoon scenes etc. The word *mleccha* occurs in this work for foreigners.

VI. *Maduraikkāñji.*

1. Māngudi Marudanār.
2. Pāṇḍyan Neḍuñjeḻiyan.
3. *Āśiriyappā,*
4. 782 lines.
5. It deals with the battles of this Pāṇḍyan king, the physiographic divisions of the Pāṇḍyan country and their characteristics, city of Madura, its people, the city by day and by night etc.

VII. *Neḍunalvāḍai.*

1. Nakkīrar
2. Pāṇḍyan Neḍuñjeḻiyan.
3. *Āśiriyappā.*
4. 188 lines.
5. It deals with love pangs of the Pāṇḍyan queen when the king has gone to battle, and her prayer to Koṟṟavai (Durgā) for uniting them early, the separation in cold season. It comes alike under *Pālai* type of composition by its love sentiment and *Vāgai* type by its heroic sentiment.

VIII. *Kuṟiñjippāṭṭu.*

1. Kapila.
2. Aryan king Brihadatta.
3. *Āśiriyappā*
4. 261 lines.
5. Aims at the inculcation of Tamil literary flavour to the king by the poets. Deals mainly with the love theme of union in secret *(kaḷavu)* etc. The water sports of the beloved ; and mentions in the flower plucking context, the

names of 99 flowers. The word *Mleccha* occurs in this work also.

IX. *Paṭṭinappālai.*

1. Kaḍiyalūr Uruttirankaṇṇanār.
2. Karikāl Peruvaḷattān Chōla.
3. *Āśiriyappā* (with *Vañ'i* body and *Āśiriya* ending)
4. 301 lines.
5. It treats of the departure of lover to another land and how he feels the absence of the beloved. The poet is said to have been presented with 16 crores of gold pieces by the king as a prize for the excellence of the composition. It describes life at the Chōḷa capital Kāvērippaṭṭinam, in great detail and how the king enriched Uṟaiyūr, the glory of the Chōḷa country.

X. *Malaipaḍu Kaḍām.*

1. Perumkauśikanār of Peruṅkunṟūr in Iraṇiyamuṭṭam
2. Nannan of the hill country.
3. *Āśiriyappā.*
4. 583 lines.
5. It deals with a singer (Kūttan) who approaches the king for patronage. It describes many kinds of musical instruments, the life of the hill folk, the different sounds heard in the hill region, the description of the city of the king, the presents brought by the vassals who had come to see the king, their panegyrics etc.

It is the view of scholars that these 10 compositions might have to be placed in the following relative chronological order.*

II, IV, IX, VIII, X, VI, VII, I, V, III.

We would now deal with the 8 *togai* (anthologies)

The eight *togai* compositions are (1) *Naṟṟiṇai,* (2) *Kuṟuntogai,* (3) *Aiṅguṟunūṟu,* (4) *Padiṟṟuppattu,* (5) *Paripāḍal* (6) *Kalittogai,*

* S. Vaiyapuri Pillai *Ilakkiyadīpam,* the age of ten songs, P. 11

(7) *Ahanānūṟu* and (8) *Puṟanānūru.* It is generally held that they would lend themselves to a chronological sequence such as 2, 1, 7, 3, 4, 8, 6, 5. Some early commentators like Naccinārkkiniyar take *Ahanānūṟu* as the earliest of the series. Each of these is a collection of verses and gives the names of the poets who contributed to them. They have been compiled together and presented to royal patrons. This information about the compiler and the royal patron is not often forthcoming.

1. *Naṟṟinai.*

(a) Compiler :	—	Unknown.
(b) Patron	—	Pāṇḍyan Māṟan Vaḻudi.
(c) Metre	—	*Ahaval*
(d) Number	—	400 Verses.
(e) Topic	—	It essentially

deals with '*Aham*' type of details

2. *Kuṟuntogai :*

(a) Said to be by 205 poets.

(b) Pūrikkō

(c) *Ahaval*

(d) 400 verses.

(e) *Aham* type of details, love dominant. Names of some royal poets are interesting such as Madurai Gaṇḍarāddttar, Peruṅkaḍuṅgō etc.

3. *Aiṅguṟunūṟu :*

(a) Unknown.

(b) Yānaikkaṭcēy–Māndarañjēralirumpoṟai.

(c) *Ahaval.*

(d) 500 verses.

(e) Divided into five parts on the basis of physiographic divisions of the country.

Each centum of songs is divided into decade subject-wise like *Kaḷavanpāṭṭu, Mañjaippāṭṭu* etc. It has a very valuable old commentary which is, however, incomplete,

4. *Padiṟṟuppattu :*

(a) Unknown.

(b) Unknown Chēra kings.

(c) *Ahaval.*

(d) 100 poems.

(e) Comprises ten decades, each on a Chēra king. No information about the compiler or the royal patrons. At the end of each decade is a verse dealing with the poet of the decade, the patron etc., and it is composed in the form of the *Praśastis* of epigraphs. These terminal verses must have been subsequent to the compilation but prior to the time of the commentator of this work.

5. *Paripāḍal :*

(a) Unknown.

(b) Unknown.

(c) *Iśaippā.*

(d) 70 songs.

(e) We have only 22 available of this work. In the original, it states 8 pertained to Viṣṇu, 31 to Muruga, Durgā or Varuṇa 1, Vaigai 26 and Madurai 4.

Of the extant, we have 6 of Viṣṇu, 8 of Muruga and 8 of Vaigai. At the end of each verse, the name of the poet, the person who set it to music and the melody (*paṇ*) in which it was set are mentioned. We have names of such melodies as *Pālaiyāḷ nōdiram, Kāntāram.* We have a commentary for this work by the famous Parimēlaḻagar.

ADU ARCHIVES

6. *Kalittogai :*

(a) Unknown

(b) Unknown.

(c) *Veṇbā.*

(d) 150 verses.

(e) We have fortunately all the 150 verses intact. They contain 36, 29, 35, 17 and 13 verses on each of the five physiographic divisions. It is also said that the following poets composed them : Kapila, Nalluruttiran, Arunchōḷan, Marudan Iḷanāgan, Nallaṇḍuvan, Perukaḍuṅgōn. We have a commentary on this by Naccinārkkiniyar. Some scholars believe that this is the composition of one and the same poet, namely, the last but one mentioned above and not five. It deals with *Aham* topics but has the same musical features like the *Paripāḍal.*

7. *Ahanānūṟu :*

(a) Madurai Uppūrikkuḍi Kiḻār's son Uruttiraśanmar

(b) Pāṇḍyan Ugraperuvaḻudi

(c) *Ahaval.*

(d) 400 poems.

(e) It is divided into three main parts called *Kaliṟṟuyānai*, *Maṇimiḍai pavaḷam* (is it *maṇipravāḷa?*) and *Nittilak-kōvai.* They deal with life in the different physiographical regions. 145 poets have together composed the verses of this work. One of the best works for reconstruction of ancient Tamil life on the '*Aham*' side.

8. *Puṟanānūṟu* :

(a) Unknown.

(b) Unknown.

(c) *Ahaval.*

(d) 400 poems.

(e) Extensively deals with the three main Tamil kings, their wars and other heroic deeds. 156 poets have together contributed to this work.

CHAPTER II

THE PEOPLE AND DAILY LIFE

The Tamilnāḍ of the Śaṅgam period spread from the Arabian Sea, around the Indian Ocean to the Bay of Bengal and extended upto Tirupati hills. Today, Kerala has become a linguistic--cultural unit, the northern fringes of Tamilnāḍ have been appropriated by Andhra Pradesh by the attenuation of Tamil culture there and the impact of Andhra elements. The culture of the ancient Tamils was thus more variegated than now, and this was the direct result of the physiographic divisions of the land and the climate. These physical divisions comprise the forests, the hills, the plains, and the littoral. *Tolkāppiyam* refers to such of these as *Kāḍuṛai ulagam, Maivarai ulagam, Tiruppunal ulagam* and *Perumaṇal ulagam.* The forests were called the *Mullai* country, the hills and environs were called *Kuṛiñji*, the plains studded with wet fields and standing crops were called *Marudam*, and the sandy coastal tract was called *Neydal.* In addition to these a fifth zone '*Pālai*' is also recognised but not as a separate physiographic division but as a state of aridity, scrub vegetation and generally hot climate. This could also be an extension of the *Mullai* or *Kuṛiñji* lands in some cases.*

The Śaṅgam literature dealing with the domestic and secular themes classified the social etiquette and sophistication (*tiṇai*) on the basis of the physiographic divisions mentioned above. But it is not to be taken as a watertight division of social behaviour, but rather as a backdrop against which poets chose to deal with the people of each region. The more significant aspect of such a classification would, however, seem to be the specific climate and weather that has been associated with each of these physiographic divisions, and which

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* *Maduraikkāñji*, ll. 313-314 refer to *Kuṛiñjippālai*

are harmonised with the patterns of social virtues of the people inhabiting them. The poets have rendered full justice to this seasonal pattern in each zone and have even carefully observed the fauna and flora of these zones, not to mention their mineral wealth. Thus arose a conventional analysis of each of these regions on the basis of these primary and diagnostic elements which are eight-fold,* viz., God, staple food, fauna, flora, birds, folk-habits, occupations, and musical instruments, which were considered as the mundane (*karu*) features by the poets. These are the persistent and synthesised norms on which the cultural spectra of the entire Tamil country have been differentiated in the Śaṅgam classics. Expert poets who could deal with considerable insight with the life of one or the other of the five physiographic zones had also been recognised.

We would do well to keep in mind the broad framework of the material elements of each of the zones on the eight-fold classification, before we can take up the detailed consideration of the life of *common people* first, in each of these five regions, and then go on to the *metropolitan life* in early Tamil country, as reflected in Śaṅgam classics. By the addition of the word *piṟavum* (literally 'and others') in *Tolkāppiyam* it was taken as suggested by its commentators that information on flowers, water source and types of habitations have further to be included in this framework and this was found consolidated by the later commentators.

Detailed classification is given in a tabular form in the following pages.

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* *Tol. Aham* 20

The following tabular list sums up the above data :

Tract/ Culture.	Kuṟiñji	Mullai	Marudam	Neydal	Pālai
God	Murugan (Śēyōn)	Viṣṇu (Mayōn)	Indr (Vēndan)	Varuṇa	Durgā (Koṟṟavai)
Food	Tinai (Millets) & bamboo rice	Varagu (Ragi) & Śāmai & Mudirai	Red & white rice	Fish & salt	The collections from waylaying & molesting
Flora ; tree & flower	Agil (incense), Aram, teak Aśoka & Nāga-kāndaḷ & Vēṅgai flower (cassia)	Koṉṟai & Kāyā, Mullai, Paḍavu Taluri flower	Vañji, Kañji & Maruda (*Arjuna*) Kuvaḷai (lily) & lotus.	Punnāga, Nāḻal and Kāndaḷ Kētaki & Vendal flowers	Dry Iruppai, Sēmai Uḷiñai etc. Pāṭali flower
Bird	Parrot and peacock	Wild cock and hen	Tārā and duck, owl, crane, goose etc.	Geese and lark etc.	Eagles, vulture and pigeon

Folk-lore	Murugiyam and Toṇḍigappurai	Erukōṭparai (dance & bull fight)	Maṇa Muḻavu & Nellari kiḷai	Mīnkaṭpaṟai	Suraikoṭpaṟai Niraikaṭpaṟai
Occupation	Honey collection, digging edible roots, parrot tending	Tending sheep & cattle, raising brief dry crops	Agriculture : sowing, reaping, bull fight, etc.	Fishing & salt-panning	Waylaying & molesting travellers
Water source	Waterfalls & springs	Wild streams	River, well and pond	Sand-wells and dug wells in blackish water	Freshwater well and springs
Type of habitation	Siṟukuḍi & Kuṟicci	Pāḍi, Cēri & Paḷḷi	Pērūr, Mūdūr etc.	Paṭṭinam & Pākkam	Parandalai
Musical instrument	Kuriñji yāḻ	Mullai yāḻ	Maruda yāḻ	Neydal yāḻ	Pālai yaḻ

It may be understood that these classifications have been standardised by the commentator Naccinārkkiniyar from the data available in the poems. No such deliberate classifications were implicit in the poems themselves. We have, indeed, such additional data as the type of people and their headmen in these five regions, found in the poems and these are of considerable social groups. For instance, *Kuṟiñji* people were hillmen, hunters, gypsies, etc., and their headmen were Veṟpan, Śilamban, Poruppan–Koḍicci etc. *Mullai* folk were shepherds, cowherds, milkmen etc., and their headmen went by the names, Aṇṇal, Tōṉṟal, Kuṟumpoṟai, Nāḍan, Manaivi etc.; *Marudam* people were Kaḷamar, peasants, etc., and their headmen were known as Mahiḻman, Ūran, Manaiyoḷ, etc. *Neydal* people were Nuḷaiyar, Timilar, Paradavar etc., and their headmen were called Koṅgan, Tuṟaivan, Śērppan, Mallampulamban etc.; and *Pālai* people were Eyinar, Maṟavan, etc., and their headmen were found to have the names of Mīḷi, Viḍalai, Kāḷai etc.

THE RURAL REGIONS

Notwithstanding the vignettes of such categories of information found in the small poems, we have necessarily to depend on the larger compositions for an integrated account of the life of the people in different regions and we are not disappointed in this when we consider *Maduraikkāñji*, *Perumbāṇāṟṟuppaḍai* and *Mulaipaḍu Kaḍām*, the first mentioned (*Madurai*) taking care to give an exhaustive account of all the categories as found in the Pāṇḍyan country alone, even including the various suggestive sounds and cackling of men, animals and birds. Let us stand by for a while and hearken unto them, lest we should miss their lively import reflecting the activities of the bygone age.

In the fertile *Marudam* tract, the shouts of the fishermen, the shrill note of the crushing of the sugarcane, the vigorous calls of the intoxicated *kaḷamas* exerting to lift the old bullocks which while ploughing had got stuck up in the soft mud, the distant festive notes in the temple town of Tirupparankuṉṟam, the young couples splashing water while bathing in the freshes, all these mingle with the

humming of the bees and the screeching of the water birds and produce a homely note.

In the *Mullai* country, the gazelles in pairs frisk and jump in merriment sporting their golden spots, the bare rocks under the trees are covered with the close spread of forest flowers, and the limpid pools with clusters of blue flowers here and there lend high colour to the setting.

Again, proceeding to *Kuriñji*, the smell of sandal wood and incense mixes with that of ginger, turmeric and pepper which have been cut and piled up on the rocky ground. The sound of parrot-chasing in the fields mingles with that of the rousing cry of the hill-men driving away the cattle which have found their tasty food in the bean stalks laden with flowers, and these are all but smothered by the piercing screams of the wild boar being done to death after being trapped in covered pits by the hunters on the upper terrace of the hill, and heightened further by the roar of the tiger which had stalked and pounced upon the black boar. All together rise in endless echo, combined with the noisy fall of the hill torrent.

See, again, the dreary contrast in the *Pālai* country where the dry bamboo catches fire by friction of constant rubbing in wind, and where the barren water courses look desolate without a trace of water, while the wild wind howls around the bleak caverns, the stray grass huts house the predatory tribes ever alert with bows and arrows to waylay the unwary straggler into their domain.

And, finally, behold the *Neydal* littoral, with the bustle of boats ready to take off to far-off shores fully laden with pearls, chank bangles, trinkets, pure rich salt, and dried fish in stacks, moving rhythmically in the shallow waters on the sandy coast.

Thus are described the many rare entrancing scenes* of the countryside. Details such as the *Kuriñji* people taking their dogs

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Narriṇai 278-285 ; *Perumbāṇārruppaḍai:* 142 ; *Murugār* 95 ; *Aham* 202 : 1-4; *Puram* 177 ; 13-16,

with them on hunt, on filling bamboo pipes with the sweet-smelling toddy called '*tōppi*' for overnight fermentation, their eating along with venison, porcupine flesh also, their using receptacles made of palm fronds, are not lost sight of. Similarly too is the sight of hill children undergoing self-taught training by aiming their thorn-tipped arrows discharged from small improvised bows, on the large rats seen emerging from the fences of the cotton crops (*Puṟam* 324: 1–8).

No single Śaṅgam work is so redolent with the multifarious cacophony of life as *Malaipaḍukaḍām* as its name itself suggests. Here one can verily revel in a welter of sounds of hunt, water sport, monkey groups losing their young ones which could not grip the branch across the ravine firmly, elephant fight, porcupine rush, the tussle between wild bulls (called '*Maria*' in this work*) which the poet Perumkauśikanār has garnered in such vividness and painstaking accuracy of detail.

All these have been mostly about *Kuṟiñji*. We shall now learn something about the activity in *Mullai* tract.** The huts in the tract had short posts and were tied up with the fodder required by the sheep these people tend. The people sat on spreads of ragi leaf (dried) and slept on goatskin. The compound of the hut carried short pegs for tying cattle. There were also pens with thorny fence around for the rams and goats. Heaps of dry cattle dung littered the surface around and within their houses. The warming fire is lit outside the house for warding off cold at night, and they know how to raise fire by using churning sticks. These shepherds always wear leather footwear and due to tough and constant use of these sandals, their feet appear calloused. They stand resting on their staff and carry, besides, a fork stick (for removing foliage) and axe, and carry burdens placed in two slings tied to a pole which they place on their shoulder and walk in jerky steps. Their hair is sticky

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* Has it anything to do with the Maria Gonds?

** *Aingur* 439; *Perumbān*, 149-155; *Puṟam* 324; 10-11; 331: 4-5; *Aham*. 21-22; *Perum*, 175: *Puṟam* 54: 10-11; *Perum:* 172-274; *Aham* 266: 10-13, 94:15-17; *Puṟam* 265; 4-5

and smelly due to smears of fresh cow's milk. They deck themselves with forest flowers of many colours. They play on flutes and on harps which have animal guts as strings. Their women are of comely mien and complexion and wear palm leaf ear studs and have firm shoulders like bamboo joints and flowing black tresses of hair. They barter paddy and gold for the curds, milk and ghee they sell. They store grains in large earthen jars. Their courtyards display cartwheels by the side of the plough. Their folk dance '*kuravaikūttu*' is essentially in praise of their favourite God Viṣṇu (Tirumāl). They also fix menhir stones and tie garlands around them and worship them. Since *Marudam* tract is adjoining *Mullai* in the lower altitude, it is not surprising to hear that the border areas of the *Mullai* country are given to agriculture. Their villages are encircled by thorny bush fences. These people whose cultivation is mainly that of millets, store their harvested grains in standing earthen jar 'silos' in their courtyard. There is also a small thatched pavilion of millet leaves and stalk. The cattleshed is usually thatched with dry hay. These people have a more settled occupation in agriculture, although it was only 'subsistence' standard.

Their folk-pastime is bull fight wherein young lads chase bull calfs and try to bring them under control using only the bare hand. This is known as '*Erukōḍal*'. This was raised to the dignity of a socio-cultural festival in which the entire village participates and particularly the coy milkmaid lasses take care to attend them and see the village youth steal alike the prizes and their hearts.

Coming to the *Marudam* tract we may note that this was the most fertile part of the country and was located in the plains with access to the sea-board. Thus, as different from *Kuṛiñji* and *Mullai* which are known as *vanpulam* (hard country), *Marudam* is called *menpulam* (soft and alluvial land). The habitations of these *Marudam* people are known as *ūr*, and differentiated as *sirrūr* and *pērūr*, according to their size, importance and cultural background.

The *Marudam* villages are invariably surrounded by green fields. The house rose tall with terraces beyond the reach of normal ladders. Their barns were well stacked with rice of many varieties. Many cows dozed in their backyards, having been tied together with their ewes,

tied to short tethers by bright-coloured coir ropes. Carpenter lads of the village produced attractive wooden chariots which toddlers in the village dragged in sport, and having tired themselves thus, avidly sucked their mother's breasts and went into a nap quickly. Nature and man bestowed all the bounty to these people and thus their villages were called havens without a sign of hunger* by Uruttiran Kaṇṇanār.

There were many tanks and ponds of fresh water in these villages, some of them green with moss due to lack of full use. There were, of course, many rivers in these areas which irrigated the fields and produced gardens, rushing well-coordinated sluices. These rivers were fringed with very tall Arjuṇa (marudam) and Vañji trees. The villages were adjoined by *paḷḷis* (the locale of milkmen) and *chēris* of many social groups. The people of these *Marudam* tracts were called Kaḻamas, Uḻavas (*Porunar.* 194 ; *Malaipaḍu.* 469; *Puṟam.* 13 : 11 ; 289 : 3 ; 230 : 13). Their paddy fields were found fringed with green reeds. The wet fringe of the field was thriving with crabs and fish of many kinds. Their ploughshares were curved like the mouth of a cow-elephant and having a tip which resembled the angular sharp head of the iguana (*uḍumbu*). They carefully selected the bullocks that were to be yoked to the plough (*Puṟam.* 259 : 1–3). They did not tire to go round and round the wet field. Ploughing was not a drudgery and was well relieved by scenes of two bullocks quarrelling with each other and in the process so ploughing up the field even without the ploughshare, that they were ready for sowing seeds. The seeds were first sown in a nursery and then transplanted into the fields for full growth. They also adopted the other method of straightaway sowing the seeds in slushy area. It was estimated by the poet of *Porunarāṟṟuppaḍai* that in the Kāvērī valley, a single '*vēli*' area of wet field produced a harvest of 1000 *kalam*s of paddy (*Porunar.* 246–48). The crops when full with grains and pale in colour, were cut and stacked on the high ground adjoining the field for threshing. The poet sees even the feathers of peacock in the stacks, owing to the birds frequenting the fields in good number. The dislodging of the grain during threshing is further achieved by allowing

* ***Perum.*** **242-253;** ***Kuṟuntogai*** **113;** ***Malaipaḍu.*** **449-453**

bullocks to stalk the paddy spread. They are then winnowed high in the air for removing chaff and hay stalks from the grain. They freely give away grain to the mendicants and strangers in the threshing floor and even entertain them with dried fish and rice beer.

They also grow sugarcane and by crushing them when fully grown, produce cane juice from which they make sugar. The screeching sound of the crushing sugar mill sometimes simulates a distant cry of the elephant.

Their courtyards have mortars for beating corn into flakes and the sound of the wooden pestle is heard in rhythm. The peasants ate fish and tortoise flesh and drank sugarcane juice. The guards in the field could sometimes be seen cracking snail, on the backs of the freshwater tortoise in the fields and eating the snail slime.

Guests who arrived in the absence of the head of the family were duly entertained by the ladies, with the help of the children and were treated to crab meat, fresh rice and vegetable salad. They sometimes made special dishes of wild cocks. Rice beer invariably formed an item. The peasant children are found decked with garlands of colourful flowers and with their chests smeared with the tuft-pollen of the fragrant reeds, thus making their bodies look like the whetstone of goldsmiths carrying streaks of gold on them.

We have now to leave *Marudam* and come to *Neydal* folk. These are dependent on the sea for their life and activities. Their villages were on the sea and on the backwaters and fenced by Ketaki-shrubs. They were usually known as '*pākkam*' or '*śiṟukuḍi*' (*Naṟṟi.* 4 : 1 ; *Aham.* 320 : 5). Their houses had walls with the thin branches of good strong trees like Vañji etc., and were thatched with grass reeds. Their roofs are generally very low and in their front hang fishing rods, nets etc. These fishing folk were of supple arms and also specialised in panning for salt. Their women folk were of slender waist, fleecy flowing hair and dart-like looks. A complete description of how they bait their rods, what their nets look like, and how they fish both in backwaters as well as in the sea, is given in some of the works (*Perumbāṇ.* 253–257 ; *Naṟṟiṇai* 303). They net

sharks sometimes in the sea, by using harpoons (*Naṟṟi.* 358 : 2–4). At nights, when they are out in the sea, they keep small earthen lamps fed with fish fat. The boys on the shore were even able to identify their fathers' boats by the intensity and character of the lamps on the rafts. (*Naṟṟ.* 331 : 1–8; 372 : 10–13 ; 388 : 1–5). The catch when brought ashore is heaped on the sand, while they lounge under the shade of Punnai trees and drink toddy to forget the strain. The fish drying up in the sun attracts seabirds which are chased away by the fisherwomen. At night by the side of the fish heap, a lamp in shell fed with fish fat is placed. They barter dried fish with their necessaries, by selling them in the *Marudam* tract (*Naṟṟ.* 358 : 5-9 : 45 : 6–7 ; 175 : 1–5 and *Aham.* 320 : 1–5).

The important alternative occupation of these folk is the extraction of chank shells from the seafloors and cutting chank bangles out of them (*Madurai.* 315–316). They also sell salt. An exact description of their carts and their merchandise is found in *Perumbāṇāṟṟuppaḍai* (45–65). Lest their carts topple over in undulating terrain, they were provided with supportive axle and pins of wood. A poet brings before us the imagery of the rows of salt carts in a *Kuṟiñji* tract, causing great fun and wonder to the young *Kuṟiñji* girls standing on the roofs of their houses whose coutyard is speckled with cotton wisps. An interesting point noted of these salt-selling '*Umaṇars*' of the *Neydal* tract is that if any part of their carts get broken by accident, they do not repair them after dismantling but discard them on the way (*Puṟam.* 307 : 8–10).

When these salt sellers return home from their itinerary, their children are happy to see even monkeys in their baggage and these monkeys start playing with children a sport called '*kilukili*' by the author of *Śirupāṇāṟṟuppaḍai* (55–62). This is apparently analogous to or a *tadbhāva* of the onamatopoetic Sanskrit word for monkey pranks (*kilakilāyante*). About their eating habits, it is stated that they drink their rice gruel, with fish curry from wide dishes (*Perum.* 275–282). They worshipped God as immanent in the back-bone of the shark which they planted on the ground (*Paṭṭinappālai* 86–87).

We should now turn our attention to the *Pālai* zone. These barren tracts have a desiccated look, and dry, shrunken and sparse vegetation; water holes are dry. The ground is strewn with sharp angular gravel. Mirages are common in this tract. This is described variously as the formless devil (*uru-il-pēy*), static chariot (*ūrāttēr*), the flashy chariot (*ilaṅgutēr*) and ghost-chariot (*pēy-t-tēr*) by the Śaṅgam writers*. Famished elephants just manage to exist here by drinking the slushy water. The difficulty of traversing the *Pālai* tract is also emphasised by such words as *pōkku aru-veṇ-śuram* (*Kalittogai* 13 : 9). The people living here are known as *Eyinar* and their villages are called *Kuṛumbu* and their houses are thatched of date palm and give the appearance of the back of the porcupine. Even the squirrels and rats do not dare to run over these roofs lest they should be slashed by the tips of the leaves. Bows strung duly and arrows are found in good number in these houses. Bundles of arrws could be found placed on a loft. Dogs tethered with chains are not an uncommon sight. At the entrance to their well-fenced villages are to be found sharp wooden spikes fixed in rows (*Perum.* 83–88 : 118-129). These people are of seasoned body and muscle, with a feline look, and considerable darking; they grow their beards long and twist their ends like the horns of the (*iralai*-stag) *Barasingha* (*Kalittogai* 4 : 1–5 ; 15 : 1–7). They wear re-tinted cloth (*Aingu.* 363, *Naṛṛi* .33) and always wear leather sandals on their feet. Apart from brigandage, they are always seen hunting animals with considerable skill and caution; they would crouch in soakpits unobserved in the night and await and stalk their prey, the boars which would come to partake of the scarce supply of water. By day they spread their nets around the bushes and rouse the hares out of their holes and catch them in the nets, for which they use the hunting dogs also. They are also adepts in cattle-lifting. They have a sadistic pleasure in tormenting the unfortunate victim of a wayfarer who had nothing to part with. They play on *tuḍi* while marauding (*Kalit.* 15: 4) and on the *taṇṇumai* while lifting cattle (*Aham.* 297 : 16). It is said the sound of these instruments would strike terror into the hearts of the travellers who pass by (*Aham.* 87: 8–10). Their girls collect assiduously the

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* **Aham 67 : 15-17 and *Kalittogai* 24-10**

grains brought together in large anthills by wild ants (*Aham*. 387 : 1–5). The women, after delivery, lie on soft deer skin beds, while others are busy collecting grains from anthills. They eat the flesh of the iguana caught by their dogs along with the boiled grains gruel (*Perum*. 130 : 13). They worship stone menhirs, the spirits resident in burial tombs and tie flowers to the standing stone shafts, play on *tuḍi* and offer rice beer and ram kid in propitiation (*Aham*. 35 : 6–10).

Having thus said much about the common folk of the five-fold physical divisions, we should now draw the picture that we get of metropolitan life in large and small towns, which certainly was more eclectic, cosmopolitan and varied. They were not, of course, forming a new norm but undoubtedly were high grade and quite sophisticated. We hear much on the life in the capital cities of Puhār, Uṟaiyūr, Madurai, Vañji, Koṟkai etc., from the bards of the Śaṅgam age, and it is to this now that we would shift our attention.

CITIES AND TOWNS

The Śaṅgam literature furnishes us with quite a considerable list of names of small towns as well as cities, besides a few places outside Tamilnāḍ in India and overseas. Besides the well-known capitals of the three noted kings of Tamilnāḍ, we have the names of the chief towns of such other subordinate or local chieftains, as Tagaḍūr of Adigamān, Kolli of Ōri, Parambu of Pāri, Eḻil of Nannan, all of the *Kuṟiñji* tract; Vēlūr, Ollaiyūr etc., of the *Mullai* country; Ambar, Attavāyil, Aḻundai, Ārkkāḍu, Kuḍavāyil, Uṟandai, etc., of the *Marudam* zone; and Kāvērippaṭṭinam, Marmagūrppaṭṭinam, Eyilpaṭṭinam, Koṟkai, Toṇḍi, Muśiri of the *Neydal* strip. The Śaṅgam poets had the convention sometimes of comparing some of these prosperous towns with ladies for their virtues, as they have done in the case of Ārkkāḍu, Attavāyil, Iruppai, Uṟandai, Kaḻumalam, Kuḍavāyil etc. Some had also been marked out as famous religious centres of pilgrimage, with their temples, as of Ālamuṟṟam (Madurai), Alaivāy (Tiruccendūr), Tirupparankunṟam, Māliruñjōlai (Aḻagarkōil), Irundaiyūr, Araṅgam (Śrīraṅgam), Ēragam, Āvinankuḍi etc. We note that the villages mentioned in these classics could be classified on the basis of their terminal adjuncts ending variously in Vāyil, Kāḍu, Kuḍi, Āṟu, Kānam, I, Am etc. We are tabulating some of these hereunder.

Ūr	Vāyil	Kāḍu	Kuḍi	Āṟu	Kānam	Il	Am
Uṟaiyūr	Attavāyil	Ārkkāḍu	Ālaṅguḍi	Iḍaiyāṟu	Ālaṅgānam	Aṟiśil	Araṅgam
Aḻundūr	Arimana-vāyil	Māṅgāḍu	Kuṟuṅguḍi	Talaiyāṟu	Śākkānam	Aḻumbil	Orōḍagam
Āmūr	Kuḍavāyil		Siṟukuḍi			Podumbil	Kalumalam
Vēlūr	Vemmani-vāyil		Manakkuḍi			Porundil	Pākkam
Karūr							Pāram
Viyalūr						Vilangil	Vallam
Muḷḷūr							Veṅgaḍam
Uṟattūr							Veḷiyam.
Kaḍiyalūr							
Kōvilūr							
Nallūr							
Ariyūr.							

Of course, the largest number of towns ended in the terminal attribute of *ūr*.

Most of the big towns had protective walls around them and smaller towns even on hills had heavy thorny trees or fences surrounding them; use of moats, sometimes infested with crocodiles, was also common (*Puṟam* 21 : 2–7). An interesting light on city lay-out of Madurai and Kāñchī is known by a verse from *Paripāḍal* (8 : 1–5) and *Perumbān.* (402–411); the royal palace was placed in the central or focal point and disposed around it in a series of concentric arrangements were the localities of Brahmins, princes, tradesmen, peasants, and further the artisans, potters etc., the entire design simulating the disposition of lotus petals around the central calyx. Storeyed mansions have also been freely mentioned and the ladies who stroll on their terraces sporting themselves with the ball game, became a favourite theme of poets who strikingly compared the faces of the maidens on the high terraces with the moon which lurked amidst the clouds. Specific mention has also been made in some songs about the experts in *Śilpa śāstra*, who designed the lay-out and location of the royal, civilian and other structures giving the details of how they set about them (*Neḍunalvāḍai* 72–114). *Gōpurum* entrances for palaces with Gajalakṣmi on the lintel (as *lalāṭa bimba*) are observed. Their interior premises were provided with sport gardens laid out with sandy patches where the peacock and the gazelle pottered about unmolested : there were also painted galleries. The palaces were immediately surrounded by the residences of *purōhits*, commanders, ambassadors, diplomatic couriers, spies, etc. Among the craftsmen of the aesthetic vocations, mention is made of bead-makers, goldsmiths, garment sellers, florists, unguent dealers, painters etc. The musical mendicants-*pāṇas*-were usually residing just outside the town in *chēris*. The festivals in temples for Viṣṇu, Murugan, Indra, Balarāma, Kriṣṇa, Śiva and Durgā are celebrated in these homes with great eclat and the seventh day of the festivities was maked by a holy bath at dawn. The gods were propitiated with flowers, incense, lights, sweet-meats, fruits and rice balls. Spirits which were considered as protecting the towns were also duly appeased with offerings. There were the denominational religious institutes of the Jains and Buddhists, besides those of the Brahmins,

A significant public institution of the towns was the 'hall of justice' where dispassionate and fearless elders meted out justice to the common folk that brought them their cases. The hall of justice at Uṟaiyūr, the capital of the Chōḷas, was justly celebrated, as *Puṟam*, and many other works have indicated (*Puṟam* 39 : 9–10); *Naṟṟiṇai* 400 : 7–8, *Aham* 93 : 4–5). The city bazaars were divided into day-markets and night shops; merchandise of many varieties were traded in these bazaars, sold by elderly matrons while the trudging of different kinds of vehicles, chariots etc., mingled with the cacophony of street vendors filled the dusk air. 'Time' was counted by hour glasses (*kannal*) and the activities filling the routine of men on the *yāmas* of the day and night, have been carefully delineated in *Maduraikkāñji*. We have mention of such well-known daily programmes at the palace like the *sūtas*, *māgadhas* and *vaṇdis* praising the king at day-break. At seaport towns, we are told the loads of merchandise lying on the wharfs were after inspection stamped with the tiger-seal of the Chōḷa royalty. The goods littered there included the gem stones from the northern hills, pearls from the southern sea, pepper from Muzris, articles from Gaṅgā, Ceylon, Sumatra, etc. The Yavana foreigners had their quarters close to the port. The people—men, women and children—gave themselves up to legitimate material pleasure and cultivation of fine arts.

ĀRYAN CULTURE

A comparatively more significant aspect of the social matrix of the Śaṅgam age about which there has been practically no factual appraisal or legitimate enquiry till now by scholars is the extent of impact of the so-called Āryan or northern institutions on the indigenous life. Here, we are probably likely to tread on many corns, if not on forbidden ground, but there would not seem to be any great ambiguity in the literary evidence itself in the matter. There does seem to have been may be limited, an orchestration of the caste system already in the Śaṅgam age, even with attendant conflicts manifest here and there. We have an interesting vignette in *Aham* (366) of the activities of agricultural folk, the dust from whose threshing floors settled on the salt pans of the fish folk who were

roused to a hearty quarrel in midfield, and that was patched up by the elders who interceded, and all ended well with the exchange of vintage toddy from the peasants to the fishermen.

Let us very briefly consider the incidence of the four-fold caste hierarchy of the times. The Brahmins spent their time chanting Vedas, performing sacrifices with the triple fire, wearing the sacred thread and worshipping Agni, reared cows, but not hen and dogs, in their residences; they spiced their cooked rice with raw pomegranate for sourness and with pepper added to it and ate it with mango pickles and buttermilk (*Perumbān*: 297–310). Lands were gifted free to them by kings for their fervent prayers and divine calling (*Perambāṉ*. 367 : 45 and *Padiṟṟuppattu* 64 : 3–6). The more ascetic among them were found with *tridaṇḍa, kamaṇḍalu*, and saffron robes and reared hermitages for religious instruction and sacrifices (*Maduraikkāñji* 468–474). The intelligent among them were appointed as royal preceptors or sent as diplomatic emissaries to other kings: Kapilar, a friend of chieftain Pāri, was a case in point. They were held in high esteem by kings and commoners (*Puṟam* 6 : 19–20).

The kings' palaces have been already referred to. The royal insignia included the banner, umbrella, drum, flowers, sword etc., and they had the fourfold divisions of the army (*Tolkāppiyam–Marabu* 72). They were counselled by a team of ministers, safe-guarded by bodyguards and entertained by *pāṇas, kūttas* etc. They patronised poets and learning as a rule.

The trading classes lived in great style. They worshipped demi-gods, sustained rituals and Brahmins, and established a general rectitude both in munificence as well as social behaviour.

The peasant classes increased the agricultural population and kept the people prosperous, thus forming the backbone of the land. A poet (Nāganār of Veḷḷaikkuḍi) tells the king Kiḻḻivaḷavan, that all his victorious campaigns and fruits of victory have been made possible only by the industrious peasantry, in a *Puṟam* passage (*Puṟam* 35 : 25–26).

The artisans of the society included carpenters, blacksmiths, potters and goldsmiths. By their manual labour their bodies were of taut glistening skins. The smithy had the foot-operated bellows for kindling fire and they annealed the red-hot iron lump in cisterns of water ; sparks (compared to small flowers) flew from their anvil when they were at work ; the carpenters used axes, chisels, vices and pliers in their job. It is they who fashioned the plough for the fields, the doors for the houses, the carts for the roads and even the harps and lyres for the leisure hour (*Puṟam* 296 : 11–13; *Neḍunal.* 85–86 ; *Śiṟupān.* 256–258). The goldsmiths used the touch-stone (called *kaṭṭaḷai*) for testing the quality of gold ; while the coppersmith applied himself in making copper and bronze vessels and chiselled them to shape and surface brilliance ; the pearl strand maker dexterously polished the pearls and perforated them. The shell-slicers were mostly drawn from indigent and uneducated Brahmins who made bangles from chank. The potters lay the dough of kneaded clay on the '*tigiri*' or the rotating wheel-beat and activated it by a stick. They wear garlands of *nocci* seed (which was apparently used for burnishing pottery, as is done even today) and take active part in folk arts and entertainments. The weavers wove elegant cloths of cotton and silk after removing all stiffness from the cotton seed by submitting it to the 'bow' treatment. Silk garments had tassels on the edges and were worn only during daytime, cotton alone being worn at night (*Naṟṟi.* 299 : 7–8; *Porunar.* 155 : *Paṭṭina.* 107). Besides these, there were the basket makers and cot makers who were rather low in the social grouping. But undoubtedly they enriched the life of the masses as much as other artisans did. The entire account of the classes and masses and craftsmen, clergy and the kings, so copiously dealt with in the Śaṅgam classics with sympathy and discerning understanding, gives us a well-integrated picture of society, where talent always found its ready patronage and handsome reward, and no artificial stigma was attached to the pursuit of their respective avocations by the different social groups.

We have just been mentioning the fourfold classes in society. But we have no reason to assume that this classification was imposed, superficial or polemical. We find the society permeated by a multipli-

city of sects and communities wedded to specific avocations and considering themselves as mere limbs of the body-politic. What is more, we have pointed references to the fact that the functional grouping in society, admittedly of relatively higher and lower strata, was deeply ingrained ; there was even a notable tendency towards assuming some purely external trappings for elevating their classes by sub-dividing even the non-Āryan local society into Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and manual sects, drawing their origin from a mythical '*agnikula*', by putting on the sacred thread without the full attendant ritual and initiation that was prevalent in the case of the Brahmins. In spite of a steady and well-meaning permeation of the Āryan way of life, habits and rituals, there is no evidence that Tamils were subjected to any element, either of compulsion or social discrimination, of a deliberate kind proceeding from the incoming groups. The enthusiasm with which the already considerably synthesised and liberalised Āryan myth, religion, and social behaviour pattern were imbibed in the Tamil country has an obvious measure of spontaneity in it. Institutionally, hierarchically and socio-culturally, the northern trends were consciously assimilated and it is not therefore surprising that we have a proliferation of functional communities each operating under accepted taboos and privileges, and each striving to come up as much as it can by ethical and metaphysical disciplines. We are told the society was having the following communal services catering to its organisational, material, cultural, artistic and moral needs. The painters, architects, culinary experts, the weavers, washermen, physicians, royal attendants, minstrels, vigil-keepers, animal tamers, charioteers, boatsmen, cartwrights, menials, the hill tribes, the predatory tribes, the musicians, mendicants, the priests and clergymen—all these were the known and well-consolidated entities in the society and undoubtedly their selfless endeavour kept the social weal and progress on an even keel. The way in which while elucidating certain propositions, *Tolkāppiyam* (*Tol. Poruḷ-kaḷavu* 1, *Eḷuttu-piṛappu* 20-21) frequently takes recourse to a comparison of the northern tradition on a corresponding topic would well emphasise the considerable familiarity that the Tamil literate had with the north Indian vogues and social structure. The fact that social stratification did not display any indiscriminate or aggressive bullying or superiority complex was well indicated by the information, for instance, that although the boatmen

were rather lower in social grouping, all the castes moved in the boats while crossing waterways without observing any taboos. We find reference to a prosperous concentration of Āryans in certain towns of Tamilnāḍ and to how the contact with northern people took place in the Tamil soil itself and not outside it and was well received; all this notwithstanding there were political clashes and even victorious engagements of Tamils with Āryan kings; this would show that the society was virile, evolving and was ready to absorb all systematising trends, wherever they came from. The people from the north who came to the Tamil country were not simply Brahmins alone, they were from many communities of the north. We have mention of a type of juggler from the north who entertained people of Tamilnāḍ (*Kuṛuntogai* 7: 3–5) by fixing poles, tying ropes between them and dancing on this type (*kaḷaikkūttāḍi*) to the beating of drums.

We thus discover from the Śaṅgam classics the exact relationship that Āryan (by which the total northern Indian social matrix was meant) people had with the local Tamil people, and how the transformation wrought on the Tamil scene by northern practices and social patterns, was already an accomplished fact and one which did not certainly leave the Tamil people aggrieved or protesting.

We have now only to add some selective references to some unusual types of social institutions on which Śaṅgam works throw welcome light. It is said that the class of musical entertainers who participated in festivals for the enjoyment of the common folk usuall comprised courtezans who were experts in dance and music, with instruments like flute, lyre, harp, drum etc. and the art of enticing youths with the brazen display of their physical charms. These musical parties were itinerant and moved in carts which are said to have the appearance of the open mouth of a crocodile (*makara*). Undoubtedly, the *makara* head motif must have become an established feature in art, architecture and secular crafts, and had been pointedly observed by the poet. Among the types of bards and fortune-tellers, were also mentioned the female prognosticators of the gypsy class who forecast the fortunes, usually of young rural maidens on the threshold of a well-desired marital match, with a winnowing pan full of paddy, on which these gypsies made the suspicious marks.

These people were also called *kaṭṭuviccis*, a term also found used by some of the early Āḻwārs (Vaiṣṇava saints) of Tamilnāḍ in their lyrical hymns.

We have fairly descriptive references to highway robbers, who were clad in dark apparel, wore foot-wear, were armed with daggers, knives and chisels for burgling into houses, and who kept tied around their waists a ropeladder of fine mesh and proven strength for scaling walls. These had even regular manuals explaining the intricacies of robbery. They were merciless in dealing with the victims they attacked at night (*Maduraik.* 631–650 ; *Kalittogai* 4 : 1–5).

We hear of the institution of bond-slaves, as different from mere menial servants. These slaves had no independence, or freedom of action and were under permanent subjugation (*Tolkāp. Aham* 23 ; *Kalittogai* 88 : 3–4). There was a full-time mendicant class which was always begging for food in receptacles called '*maṇḍai*' and making itself agreeable to the people of whom it begged by minor proficiency in arts like singing, dancing, jugglery etc. There were agencies which levied taxes, octroi and customs duties on the traffic of commodities both inland, on cross roads, and at ports (*Puṟam* 80–82 ; *Paṭṭinappālai* 124–125). The income from such duties was known as '*ulku*'. The fact that Sanskrit language had already well seeped into the local society is indicated by the use of the word '*avāṇa*' '*āpaṇa*-(Skt.) for shops and stores, in the bazaars of the trading class.

There was untiring all-round vigil by guards at reservoirs, to prevent overflow or bursting of banks during the rainy season (*Aham* 252 : 11–14). It is said that the cavalry horses were always of the imported species and thus were highly valued (*Puṟam* 304 : 3–4 ; *Paṭṭinap.* 185 ; *Madurai.* 321–323). Bodyguards of royalty wore matted hair and coats of mail. Time-keepers announced the hour by hour-glasses. Such was indeed the well-ordered life that was led by the people of Śaṅgam age, chivalrous in spirit, sophisticated in their activities and socially well-organised, ritually well-developed, and commercially well-established.

It goes without saying that the central power that organised, patronised and controlled the material pattern of such a society was a heroic, chivalrous and inspired monarchical system which stood for the highest individual integrity coupled with the most well-imbued social consciousness. The royal insignia, their naturalistic symbols like flowers and cult trees, their following the six component elements of Monarchy, mentioned by Tiruvaḷḷuvar which are but the modified version of the corresponding code enshrined in the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya were all well known. We shall deal later in extenso with the wise men and gifted genteel classes who offered wholesome counsel to the kings at all times of need. It would, however, bear special mention here that these ancient Tamil monarchs kept before them the torches of heroism, sacrifice and justice, as symbolished by the three drums they claimed, according to *Puṟam* (58 : 12–13) and *Kalittogai* (132 : 4).

Equally felicitous is the comparison in *Puṟam* (84) of the difference between legitimate consumption and the stampeding havoc of an unfettered elephant with the legitimate tithe to be paid to the king and a tyrannical imposition of taxes by him on the people ; and again the passage in *Puṟam* (2) extolling the benevolent rule of Māndarañjeral Irumpoṟai by Kuruṅgōḷiyūr Kiḷār, which proudly proclaims that no fire other than the kitchen fire was known to the people, no heat other than solar warmth, and no implements other than the plough-share, and how execpt for enceinte women with a craving for eating fresh earth, no enemy of his was hankering after his land. His sceptre was the resting place of righteousness. These and other kindred sentiments show the emotional integration between the ruler and the ruled.

CHAPTER III

SOCIAL CUSTOMS AND BELIEFS

We have already seen how the Tamil society of the Saṅgam period was open to wide influences from northern India as well as maritime contacts. We learnt how there were the four upper classes—the Brahmins, the chieftains, the traders and the peasants – and at a lower level, there were the artisans like blacksmiths, carpenters etc., but how notwithstanding this gradation, each man's contribution was considered as equal in value to the others for the social weal. Knowledge was considered a great leveller. That the social gradation was consciously adopted is well brought out by the *Puṛam* references (183 : 8–10) which mention such terms as *vēṛṛumai terinda mēṛpāl* (the difference knowing upper classes). We have also such terms as the man of 'low birth'. Thus we may take it that in all the daily activities and the rituals connected with birth, marriage, death etc., each caste established its own variant customary usage. But Saṅgam literature would be ill served, if we were to draw out of it elements of discrimination; however, one may have access to the data regarding social life from these classics. We would thus be throwing some light on the various rich and healthy customs that the Tamils of the day set some store by.

Progeny was considered as vital to the continuance of the family and clan. The birth of a child, particularly a son, was thus a matter of great moment.

Whatever may be the degree of wealth possessed by one, his home is not considered full without a child, to lisp spontaneously to toddle around and to enjoy making a mess of his food by splashing it all over the body (*Puṛam* 188); when blessing youngsters, the elders always blessed their parents also who had been wise enough to raise their children well (*Puṛam* 137: 14–15). For the attainment of progeny, the people laid their primary faith in God. They gave offerings to God for blessing them with the auspicious event (*Paripāḍal* 8; *Aiṅguru.* 257). Even kings followed this rule and we have reference to Chēramān (distinguished as the 'Peruñcēṛalirumpoṟai

who conquered Tagaḍūr) sitting with his first queen before the sacrificial fire, in order to beget a son of requisite valour and virtue (*Padiṟṟup.* 74). Women, during conception, gave ritual offerings to some demi-gods for safe confinement. Such women were also having a queer craving for fresh earth and raw tamarind, then as now (*Puṟam* 20: 13–14; *Aiṅguṟu.* 51: 3–4; *Kuṟunt.* 287: 4). Interesting information is forthcoming regarding the inherent presence of mind and stamina of maṟava women who, even when full with child, were unafraid of a charging elephant, or a creeping snake, or the roar of thunder (*Perumbāṇ.* 134–136). After conception, the girls smeared sesamum mixed in ghee on the fronts of their houses to ward off evil spirits. They also inhaled incense smoke. The institution of wet-nurses helping the mother when she could not herself breast-feed her child was known. Traditionally one's father's name was given to the child: this right of child to be christened in his grandfather's name was known as '*dāyam*' (*Aiṅg.* 403: 3; *Kali.* 75: 24–25; *Puṟam* 213: 10–11). Children were provided with tiger claw talisman around their neck in the form of a chain to protect them from evil powers. The practice of taking children from very early in their life to the temple and going round the shrine and offering obeisance to God was prevalent and thus god-fearing instinct was inculcated at a very tender age (*Kali.* 84: 5–7; 82: 4–5). The custom of celebrating one's birthday was popular. *Maduraikkāñji* speaks of the jubilant manner in which the city people celebrated Nannan's birthday (*Madurai.* 618–619). The manner in which children were brought up is also described in a few illuminating cameos. The child clamouring for milk, which is already depleted in its poor mother's breasts, had its mind distracted by the mother showing it the dog or the moon, or threatening it with talk of a tiger, or even by brandishing a baton before it (*Puṟam* 160: 22–26; *Kali.* 82: 24–25). The favourite sports of children included the rattle, ball game, dolls, building castles in sand, or imitating kitchen work. They derive some pleasure in doll-marriages, performing mock-feasts etc. Young girls spent their time in dancing the *kuravaikkūttu* and in the swing made of flax and hemp. Tending pet parrots and chatting with them was also known. It is noted that young boys and girls mixed freely both in ground sport as well as water sports, teasing and embracing one another without any adult emotions. Toddlers were everywhere

rolling their three wheeled chariots; young boys were fully familiar with the elephants which were washed in the ghat, by themselves cleaning the body of the elephant. Shepherd boys seated gaily on the back of the buffalo is another common scene; while, generally, the uneducated lads alone took to cattle-tending, the boys eagerly learnt the three R's. The cudgeon leaf manuscript copy on which black ink is smeared for easy legibility has been mentioned (*Paripāḍal* 11: 88). Students were very faithful to their teachers. In much the same way as we use the word 'scholar', the learned man was referred to as the '*māṇākkan*' (student or scholar). Numerical figures were in vogue: One, ten, hundred, thousand, crore; and such numeral names as *ṭāmarai*, *veḷḷam*, *āmbal* and *ūḻi* and such like notional figures would show their keen interest in the study of numbers. Measures or weights like *nāḻi*, *kalam*, *mā*, *cheru*, *tulām*, *kāḻañju* etc., were quite in vogue. *Tolkāppiyam* deals with the grammatical rules governing these weights and measures.

Sending messages in palm leaf and sealing the written message etc., raising hero-stones for the dead-warriors with their deeds of valour engraved in them were quite common (*Kali.* 94: 41–44; *Aiṅgu.* 352: 2). The Vedic scriptures were learnt by rote and not by committing them to writing (*Kuṟu.* 156: 4–5).

Among the women's rites, the most popular was the *ambāvāḍal* or *tai-n-nīrāḍal* by virgin girls. This bath was started on the 1st fullmoon day of the month of Māgh. Maidens got up early in the morning and, supervised and advised by matronly elders, they initiated the vows. This vow and worship was for their being blessed with a fine husband and consisted of offerings to the river-goddess, and burning incense before the ritual image. The *pāvai-nōnbu* had also an altruistic element for general welfare of the community and the world. From these two—bath in the month of Māgh and *Pāvai-vow*, about which we have copious references in Saṅgam classics, we learn much about the fundamental loyalty and religious fervour of young girls and their laudable ambitions.

It is interesting to note also that maidens had a custom of worshipping the elephant. *Paripāḍal* refers to an elephant worship

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by young damsels at Tirupparankunṟam and mentions how after the elephant had partaken of the offering the remainder was eaten by the girls. This worship was considered as specially efficacious for the girls obtaining taintless husbands and to win the hearts of their husbands. If we realise that the elephant was also considered as one of the emblems of Muruga or Kārttikeya, the basically folk-character of this typical indigenous Tamil worship by maidens can be better appreciated. In the folk-festivals and in the water sports representing the freshes in Kāvēri, Vaigai etc., it is found that the king also enthusiastically took part. There was a certain degree of freedom of movement between men and women in that society and neither was undue segregation insisted on, nor undue liberties taken. Thus arose a tendency to express freely one's heart's thought to one's lover and to seek his loyal love to herself, resulting in a love-match. We have a rather bizarre vignette of a midget male and a hunchback female meeting in the dark corridors of a temple to exchange words of love and warmth of feelings (*Kalittogai* 94). Love marriage was not scorned by elders but was indeed spoken highly of, if the circumstances did not besmirch the reputation of the lover and the beloved, and if rules of the game were followed. Eternal and steadfast love between a male and his beloved when perfect was considered as a continuing process over many births (*Naṟṟ*. 109 : 1–2). If both the parties have the full understanding of the implication of unsullied love, this was praised and was usually followed by regular wedlock. This institution of free love before married life, it may be mentioned, was one of the important features of early Tamil society. It is just possible that only with the advent of the Āryans, and also perhaps due to lapses noticed in the practice of free love, that the matrimonial tie came to be considered essential in Tamil society; giving rise, thus, to many rituals which merged into the process and attained a local colour and flavour, not generally known in north Indian marriages (*Tol. Poruḷ. Kaṟpu* 3–4). Three important features characterised the free love before family life. Firstly, the lover and the beloved exchanged messages and expressed their feelings for each other mainly through male and female companions, and these companions then reveal the truth to the parents. This is called 'strictly standing by the code.' After this stage, the parents usually contract marriage between the girl and the lad. The second category is when due to the lack of

acceptance by the parents, the beloved, of her own accord, goes to the place of the lover and starts staying with him. If neither the first nor the second was allowed to materialise and the maiden is strictly warned by her parents to desist from doing anything foolish, the third stage arises when the lover voluntarily demonstrates his undying love for the maiden, by the process called '*maḍal-ērudal*'. This consists of a horse-like object made out of woven palm-leaf, which is decorated with beads, flowers etc., and the lover riding on this dummy horse and keeping in his hand the figure of his own self and of his beloved drawn on a cloth; he puts on the appearance of a semi-demented person for whom life without his beloved would be totally meaningless. Taking pity on him and on his steadfastness, his parents and those of the maiden then arrange for their marriage (*Kuṛu.* 17; *Kali.* 58 : 20–23). There has also been the extreme instance of the lovers committing suicide, having despaired of happy wedlock, by flinging themselves down a precipice of a hill (*Aham* 322 : 3–4). The *Rākṣasa* type of forcible kidnapping of the beloved by the lover and taking her to another region and living with her, is also not infrequently known, although it is much less common (*Kali.* 62 : 14–15). Once marriage is settled, it is considered as a very sacred contract which cannot be easily severed (*Naṛ.* 74 : 10–11). Generally it was customary for the bridegroom's people to come to the bride's parents seeking the bride's hand for their son. It was quite legitimate for a bride or bride's parent to reject a bridegroom on grounds of unsuitability. Clashes sometimes occurred on such an occasion. Sometimes a contest, like a bull fight, is arranged for deciding the physical strength and bravery of the bridegroom and for accepting his claim to a girl's hand. An interesting sidelight is also afforded by the fact that the maidens completely shunned for ever those lads who were afraid of taking part in the bull fight and on the other hand waived the bride price from those brave youths who successfully controlled the bull (*Kali.* 103 : 63–64; 71–73). Presentation of bride's price and the changing of anklets in bride's legs were two functions eelebrated just before the marriage.

The betrothal function consists of prayers to God first and ceremonial bathing of the bride. The bath water was mixed with flowers, grains, turmeric etc. After bath, four married women who

have children come forward to bless the bride to be a dutiful and loyal wife to her lord. The garland of the bride consisted of the root of the *Dūrvā* grass and flowers. The bride was then led to the bridegroom's chamber and properly seated beside him. The bride's parents then offer her hand to the bridegroom, requesting him to make her the mistress of his household. On the night of the marriage, the bride and bridegroom enjoyed mutual company in solitude and the nuptials were consummated duly.

Going around the sacred fire, wearing the *maṅgaḷasūtram* etc., which happen today have not been referred to in the *Aham* songs. But by their occurrence elsewhere in certain contexts, it could perhaps be accepted that they were also in vogue, at least among certain classes of people. In a context, where the beloved (after marriage) is sending a message through the messenger coming from her husband, she is referred to as stating that she is still loving her husband with as much ardour and intensity as a fire fed by ghee and as she loved him at the time of the marriage. By the juxtaposition of these two analogies, it is perhaps to be surmised that the reference is apparently to the sacrificial fire fed by ritual ghee oblation during marriage (*Kuṟun*: 106 : 5–6). In another context, where Muḍamōġiyār extols the celebrated generosity of an *Āy* king (*Puṟam* 127 : 5), he says that this king had gifted away all his ornaments and those of his queen, to the needy. The women had only one ornament left which defied gifting away. By this is meant the *māṅgalyasūtram* which was tied at the time of marriage and which can never be removed from the wife's neck until her husband is no more. Again, in *Neḍunalvāḍai*, describing the forlorn queen, separated from the king who has gone to the battles, the poet says that her body lying limp on the bed is shorn of all ornaments except the *hāra* par excellence–namely the *māṅgalyasūtram* which rests low on her breasts (*Neḍunal*. 136–137). The first cooking by the bride and her feeding her husband with cooked rice and milk was itself converted into another ritual function (*Aham* 141 : 12–18 ; *Tol. Poruḷ Kaṟpu* 5 : 11–14). The husband considers the food which is done by her hand as equivalent to divine nectar. The bride and bridegroom looked upon each other as the mythical bird with two heads but one body and life (*Gaṇḍa–bhēruṇḍa*) as mentioned in *Aham* (12 : 4–5). Such a sentiment finds its equal also in the husband in a

love quarrel asking his beloved whether it is meet that a bird with one life can have its two heads fighting each other (*Kali* 89 : 4–6).

Inured to such a high plane of conjugal love, the wife deigns not to rebel against even the wicked actions of the husband but submits herself to him with the same loving tenderness and sweet response. Indeed, the companion's mouth, the poet reveals, is the only proper way by which she can restore him to her own love and wean him away from the courtezan 's coquettish embraces (*Pari.* 20 : 86–93 ; *Kuṟu* 2 202 : 2–5 ; *Naṟṟ.* 247 : 6–7). It is most pithilly represent-ed by the lines of *Kuṟuntogai* which make the wife say emphatically that the deep friendship which was contracted at the time of marriage is not capable of being untied (*Kuṟun.* 313 : 4–5) The unrivalled steadfastness of the wife's love has also been compared, obviously on the *Purāṇic* analogy, to the Arundhatī star on the 'Great Bear' (*Perum.* 302–303 ; *Aingu.* 442 : 44 ; *Padiṟṟ.* 89 : 18–20 ; *Kali.* 2 : 21 ; *Puṟam* 122 : 8). It is simultaneously considered in the above senti-ments that for a husband also nothing is more meritorious than to possess a wife of priceless virtue and loyalty.

The institution of courtezans may be briefly touched here. They enjoyed a certain free status in society but the stigma attached to their way of life and to those who seek them has always been emphasised. The courtezans, of course, were proficient in arts and music and had mastered the art, above all, of enticing gullible and moneyed youngsters ; they had no sentiments of true love even towards youth, although rare examples occur of single-minded love even in a courtezan as in the case of Mādhavi of *Śilappadikāram*, a post Śaṅgam work. The menfolk sought the courtezans when their wives were ill or old or otherwise unfit to lead a healthy life. There were, of course, those who sought a courtezan even when their wives were loving and attentive. It is to one such instance that *Paripāḍal* verses refer when they say, through the mouth of the courtezan who was confronted by a companion of a devoted wife who had brought her many of the wife's ornaments. The courtezan says that it was the husband who had erred in bringing her the ornaments and if the wife does not beware, he would remove her anklets also and bring them to her. These courtezans lived in a segregated part of the town. The fickle

character of a courtezan's feigned love for a man has been nowhere better crystallised than in the words of the Chōla king Nalaṅkiḷḷi who, according to the *Puṟam* (73 : 11–14), swears that if he did not inflict a crushing victory on his scoffing enemies, let his garland hug the courtezan's neck, thereby suggesting a degrading context for his garland.

An interesting account of a faithful and loving wife, the light of her family, and the glory to her land, is given in *Kuṟuntogai* (67). It says that the wife generally prepares food by her own hand for her husband and serves him herself. The wives sought pleasure in the approbation of their husbands about their culinary proficiency. A significant fact mentioned in a *Puṟam* passage (143–147) informs us that hospitality to guests was generally offered mostly when the husband was in the house or in town. When the husband is away, the wife does not entertain. Indeed even in such special cases as when poets like Kapilar, Ariśilkiḻār, Peruṅkunṟūr Kiḻār visited the house of (Vaiyāvikkōpperum) Pēhan, when the latter was separated from his wife Kaṇṇagi and was elsewhere, Kaṇṇagi expressed her helplessness in not entertaining them without the husband--a sentiment they appreciated and conveyed to Pēhan. Thus, the master of the house must be present when anybody is to be entertained—this was the Tamil custom of the Śaṅgam society.

On the other hand, womenfolk went to the extent of pawning their ornaments, when they found themselves in want, at the time of the arrival of guests (*Puṟam* 316 : 5–7 ; 331 : 7–9) and they ungrudgingly served the guests even at odd hours (*Naṟṟi*. 142 : 9–11).

If the crow cawed, it was held as a sign of the arrival of guests. On this score, they gave offerings to the crow. A lady, sensing the arrival of the husband by the cawing of the crow, which came true, says that it would be inadequate thanks even if she offered a large ball of rice to the crow.

At dust after sunset, the womenfolk lit oil lamps and worshipped the lamps with flower, foodgrains etc. Worshipping the crescent moon was also common. The antiquity of the moon worship is itself suggested in a *Maduraikkāñji* passage (193–194).

Bathing was a matter of daily routine, apart from ritual and festive baths. Among festivals, those of Tirupparankunṟam are mentioned in *Paripāḍal* at great length, giving details of the festive crowd and how they engage themselves. There is mention of Ādiśeṣa's temple, also in the same poem, where the young and old thronged for worship, to the accompaniment of music from the harp, lyre, drum etc. People prostrated before God, at His feet and sang hymns of prayer and we have many gods mentioned like Viṣṇu, Murugan etc.

We get valuable glimpses about the sense of forbearance of the housewives towards the pecuniary circumstances of their husbands. Even ladies born to prosperity, when wedded to poor husbands, were models of domestic adjustment and connubial obedience and never either flaunted their opulent birth or looked to external assistance or support. Wives considered the prestige of their husbands' family as their own. Women who lived alone, unattached and independent, were scorned and were compared to the palm leaf receptacle which having been used once for drinking water was discarded due to its pollution; or again to a deserted village; or a garland worn and discarded (*Kali.* 23 : 8–13). On the other hand, the excesses of the husband who had rejected his wedded wife and resorted to libertines was not condemned to that degree, and indeed, on the testimony of Tolkāppiyar, we may hold that it was quite legitimate for a man already married, to contract legally another bigamous marriage (*Toḷ. Kaṟpu* 31). At the same time there were faithful and righteous husbands whom the death of their wives left in a daze, and who were ready to court death themselves (*Puṟam.* 245). *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kāma* was the triple tenet in the framework of an ordered life (*Kali.* 11 : 1–4; *Kuṟuntogai* 63 : *Naṟṟ.* 214: 1–3, 7–8; *Tol. Aham. Poruḷ* : 25).

Mothers considered their sons as born to sacrifice their lives for the land of their birth (*Puṟam* 312 : 5–6). We get many important items of information about the role of battle in the political life of the kingdoms. It was a fundamental credo that wars are inevitable for kings (*Puṟam* 76 : 1–2). But wars never oppressed the common folk who were well looked after and evacuated to safety when disorder

threatened prosperous towns. Normally battles were fought mainly for capturing citadels of power and political control from the enemy terrain. When war was started on a large scale, cows, Brahmins, women and children were given top priority in shifting to places of shelter (*Puṟam* 9: 1–6). This *Puṟam* passage was actually the precaution taken by Palyāgaśālai Mudukuḍumi Peruvaḻudi—the famous early Pāṇḍyan king. Before departing for battle, the kings chose an auspicious hour to remove the sword and royal umbrella to a haven (*Tol. Poruḷ. Aṟam*. 11). The drum is beaten declaring war and hearing this, warriors rose in wavy columns to sanguinary battle. The kings usually destroyed the 'mascot trees' of their rival chiefs and made the battle drum out of them. The drums were covered with the dried but unshaven skin of bulls remaining unbeaten in conducted fights (*Puṟam* 288: 1–4). The battle drum was carefully protected and given a pride of place in the palace precincts, having a cot of its own which was spread with tiny soft flowers and the drum itself was embellished with peacock feather and garlands and was ceremonially bathed and sacrificial blood spilt in its propitiation. In battle, swords, lances as well as bows and arrows were used. The armoury was well protected and maintained. During battle, men wore the anklets, a lower cotton garment with a blue waist cloth worn tight on it. The implicit response of the warriors to the sound of the battle drums was an inspiring sight. Warriors also wore garlands during battle, getting them from florist women, after a ceremonial pre-battle bath. Ardent and battle-loving youth were given conscription and training in the form of special festivals of arms using (*Aham* 187: 7–8). Oaths and swearings about their determined goal in battle was a common feature of the turbulent scene (*Padiṟ*. 58: 5–8). The defeated kings were robbed of their drums, umbrella, armoury etc., and the victorious banner used to flutter from the backs of battle-elephants. Such terror-striking postures of retribution as the razing to the ground of the enemy fortress and ploughing the blood-smeared field with donkey-drawn plough, and sowimg millets and horse-grams were also recorded; as in the *Puṟam* passage (382: 6–11) dealing with the exploits of Pokuṭṭeḻini, son of Adiyamān Neḍumān Añji, by poetess Avvai. Calling such a deed as that of a "*villēruḷavan*" or the heroic ploughman bow-man. The queens of the defeated chief-

tains were captured and brought to the victorious sovereign's city and made to carry out menial chores as well as light lamps. Pouring ghee over the head of the enemy king after tying his hands behind his back was another indignity inflicted (*Padiṛ*. 2-- verse 4. 11). Kings of proven prowess heckled their opponents by keeping a ball and female mannequin dangling from the battlements of their towns, fixing their battle banner nearby (*Murugā*. 67–69). Victorious kings wore garlands of senna or cassia flower, as they considered Durgā immanent in this flower. Soldiers displaying outstanding courage were also presented with trophies like golden senna flower. Liquor and food flowed like a river, in the victorious camp of soldiers and this was called the little banquet. 'The magnificent pre-battle feast' given to the soldiers by the king was called the 'great banquet' (*Puṛam* 33 : 10–5). In these banquets, many heads of sheep were massacred for meat, the sound of whose frying in plentiful ghee rose high.

We must now come to a particularly glorious page of codes of bravery in battle distinctive to indigenous Tamilnāḍ of the Śaṅgam period. Warriors considered battle wounds on their chest as war trophies and gallantly bore them. But looked down with contempt on the wound in the back received while retreating to save one's skin. We have such moving references, like that of the outlook of the doughty warrior Peruñcēralādan who, while fighting Karikāl Vaḷattān, had the spear of the latter piercing through his chest to the back, and suspecting it later as a back-wound, expiated it by fasting for a specified time on the northern outskirts of his town—a ritual called '*Vaḍakkiruttal*' in the classics (*Puṛam* 65 : 66). Another inspiring passage from *Puṛam* (278) graphically described the agitated mind of a valiant mother of a soldier who heard hearsay news that her son was killed while retreating and swore that he could never have done it, and if it was true, she would cut and throw away the breast that nursed him in his childhood ; and who, rushing to the battlefield with a sword in hand, turning upside down the huddled away corpses, and finding ultimately her son's and also the marks of wound on his heroic chest, felt prouder at that moment than even when she gave birth to him. Again, the surging sentiments of maternal pride in another old lady, seeing the battle wounds of her son on the chest,

were able to make her shrivelled breast well up with wholesome milk (*Puṛam* 295 : 3–8).

The women of those who fell in battle performed certain protective rites to ward off the ghouls from possessing their dead husbands' corpses. They hung silk–cotton tree leaves or neem leaves from their roofs and raised palls of smoke by burning white sesamum seed, mixed with incense. They also sang *Kuṛiñji* melodies to the accompaniment of bells and musical instruments. If kings die of illnesss and not in battle, their bodies were placed on sacred *darbha* grass and buried thereafter, by a proper ritual, the lack of battle wounds being countered by Brahmins chanting that he should go to the warriors' heaven and by ritually wounding his chest by cleaving it with a sword (*Puṛam* 93 : 1–11). Even still-born or prematurely born and dead children were also similarly cleft with a sword and then buried. This suggests that they set great store by the ' brave death in battle'.

A characteristic sentiment of the early Tamils as found in the Śaṅgam classics is the type of death they courted when dishonour stared them in their face. This is called ' resting in the north ' *Vaḍakkiruttal* as already mentioned and is a fast unto death. Such an act was universally admired and held as an ideal.

The dead were covered with a white sheet of cloth and placed in a stretcher-like bier without legs. Cremation as well as burials in urns were in vogue. *Sati* was common, though frequently discouraged by wisemen and even despite the dissuasion, sometimes happened (*Puṛam* 246 : 11–16) as in the case of the queen of Bhūta Pāṅḍya, by name Perum-Kōppeṇḍu. On the burial spots memorial or hero-stones were also fixed and worshipped as a goddess of bravery.

The conventions of the widows have also been stipulated. They consist of discarding the use of ghee, taking water-soaked cooked rice, after rinsing the water, in handfuls, out of the rice. They use as sausage sesamum chutney and a kind of leafy vegetable after boiling it in tamarind water. They sleep on the bare ground. They do not wear bangles. They either clipped or fully shaved off their hair locks. They did not wear any ornaments (*Puṛam* 246 : 4–10, 238 : 6, 250 : 4, 253 : 5, 261 : 17, 280 : 11, 250 : 4).

An interesting sidelight in the use of hero-stones is afforded by an *Aham* passage which narrates how the soldiers sharpened their weapon on the hero-stones, and this resulted in the wearing off of the epigraph on them and when travellers were desirous of reading about the warriors, they had to get tired by closely looking at the legend to read it and often gave up the attempt ultimately (*Aham* 297 : 6–10). The hero-stone was bathed ceremonially at regular intervals and smeared with turmeric and decorated with red flowers and a cloth canopy over it (*Puṛam* 260 : 28).

Let us now deal with some of the valuable hints at the death ceremonies which carry the Vedic practices for the departed manes in their application. The beloved offered balls of rice placed on *darbha* grass pieces and this was resorted to even by low born. Water ablution (*tarpaṇa*) was also done by sons to dead parents. It was considered as a great blessing if one had a son to discharge this obligation. Indeed, such was the stress on the son in a family that those soldiers who did not have sons for performing the water oblations were eschewed from conscription (*Puṛam* 9 : 3–5). Similarly a king who was expiating a dishonour by a fast unto death, asked one of his companions to leave his camp as he happened to be devoid of a son (*Puṛam* 222 : 223).

Apart from *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kāma*, an effort was also present to find out the means of man's salvation from this birth by resorting to wise and pious paṇḍits and sages. The practice of *Vānaprastha* life (leaving the company of one's wife and seeking solitude) was also common. We have also references to exemplary couples who, having been bestowed in youth with graces and wealth, became detached in old age and ultimately became ascetics with matted locks and resorted to forests (*Puṛam* 251 : 252).

Consistent with the fairly sophisticated character of the social life, we get abundant details regarding the round-the-clock activities of the people in these classics. It would add to the comprehension of the complexion of the social routine if we present the high lights of diurnal programmes. The barest outlines will do.

We have already touched in the opening chapter on the conventional method of waking up the sovereigns, by the *sūtas*, *māgadhas*, *vandis*, *vaitālikas*, and the hymn-chanting Brahmins. These equally became the harbingers of the day for the common folk as well. An early bath in the rivers, ponds and springs followed, and many are the festivals and cults that had sprung from this early bath, *Tai-n-nīrāḍal* bath in the freshes *(puduppunalāḍal)*, sea-bath for warding off evil etc. Open bath in large and mingled groups was the order of the day. Bathing in between sessions of manual labour is also referred to (*Puṛam*: 24: 1–3). Of interest is also reference to oil massage baths for post-natal care, as also in general cases (*Naṛṛ*. 380 : 1–2). The oil used was tiloil (*Naṛṛ*. 328 : 8). Hot baths are never found mentioned.

The dress generally consisted of two lengths of cloth—the lower and the upper (*Malai*. 561–62 : *Neḍunal*, 357 : *Puṛam* 189 : 1–5). But manual workers invariably wore a single piece around the loins. Women wore only a single cloth from the waist downwards well covering the ankles and even feet. The supposition that a breast-band *(mār-kaccu)* was worn by the women is not borne out in these classics. It is possible however that ladies of high birth wore breast bands but even this is not clear. The breasts were fully bared and were indeed decorated with artistic and conventional floral designs in paints. These are often said to have been drawn by the lovers themselves (*Kuṛu*. 276 : 2–4 ; *Kalit*. 143 : 31–34). It is of some significance also to note that an alternative lower garment made of the broad leaves of water flowers is also mentioned (*Naṛṛ*. 123 : 6–7 : *Aham* 20 : 8–10). The bride price, consequently, is even referred to as the leaf-price (*tan-taḷaivilai*, *Aiṅg*. 146. 3). But this is perhaps not universal since silken and cotton cloths of fine texture were well-known. Warriors had the practice of wearing a lower white cloth carrying floral designs, and fastened around the waist was a blue cloth (*Puṛam* 274 : 1–2). They also wore occasionally a chest armour, using tiger skin for this. Only the exotic Yavanas are mentioned as wearing a close fitting tunic (*mey-p-pai*). Of great importance is a reference to the cloth of the poor which was found with coarse fabric, stitched at many torn places, and wet with sweat and infested with lice. This means stitching and garment making were already known to the

people. The garments in silk and cotton were variously called *uḍai* (dress), *āḍai* (cloth length), *aruvai, tukil* (saree length), *kaliṅgam* (*Perumbā.* 469 ; *Puṟam* 397 : 15 ; *Porunar.* 83 : *Paṭṭina.* 196 ; *Paripāḍal* 112 : 17) ; also mentioned is a special kind of saree or cloth worn by women during bathing, called *puttagam*. Foot-wear was common and made of leather (*Perum.* 169 : *Madurai.* 636 : *Paṭṭina.* 26 ; *Puṟam* 257 : 1). The hair was well tended and worn variously. Bobbing of hair by men and women is also mentioned (*Puṟam* 257 : 1–5 ; *Aham* 297 : 5–6). Brahmins had their tufted hair, and men generally had their front above the forehead cleared of hair, as a rule. The hair-do by ladies is elaborately mentioned involving buns, top-knots, curly strands, parting of hair, plaiting etc. (*Neḍunal* 137 : *Aham* 73 : 1–2 ; *Śiṟupāṇ.* 190 : 19 ; *Porunar.* 160 and *Kalitt.* 1 : 3). Men and women alike were overfond of flowers and garlands. Ninetynine flower names are mentioned actually. Wearing a sprig of Aśoka tree on the ear top was also done (*Kuṟiñji.* 113–32 *Pari.* 11 : 95). Wearing sandal, turmeric, and colouring unguents on the body was a wide practice. The materials were ground into a paste in a round quern imported from north by the 'northerners' (*Madurai.* 552–554). *Tilaka* was worn on the forehead and its redness is compared to the flaming third eye of Durgā (*Paripā.* 11 : 99–100). Ornaments of many kinds were worn, going by the names *nagai, toḍi, kuḷai, śilambu, kalai* (standing for *mekhalā*) etc. *Makarakuṇḍala* was a favourite ear ornament. For assessing milady's toilet, mirrors were employed known as *maṇḍilam* (*Aham* 71 : 13 ; *Pari.* 21 : 23–24 ; *Kali.* 25 : 1).

Food was mainly cooked or roasted and was often mixed with meat of different kinds as also pulses. Tamarind was extensively used in food preparations. It is mentioned that Brahmins used a sauce made by grinding tender and raw promegranate with pepper, and black neem leaves, and fried in ghee. Very detailed mention of a considerable range of culinary preparations is found in all the classics ; the food changing from region to region. Toddy and liquor made of rice beer and other articles were equally popular, Poṅgal (porridge of rice, dhall and sugar), *appam* (sweet *apūpa*) were also common. In houses, eating was done in privacy, and women and

persons polluted because of the birth of children or death of relatives etc., were not permitted to touch cooking vesseles or go into the kitchen for a specified time. Nor would they go to temples (*Puṛam* 299 : 6–7). Betel chewing was a favourite custom. Quality areca nut and fine shell-lime were used and the five fragrant articles like cardamon, cloves, eating camphor, *jāti* leaf etc., were used along with betel. They werc sold also in streets (*Madurai*, 400–401 ; *Kari.* 12 : 22 ; *Kali.* 65 : 13–14). Playing dice and cock fight, both with stakes, as also acrobatic display were some of the favoured entertainments for the leisure hour. Gambling was a well-known and much despised vice. There were regular booths for such gambling in towns (*Aham* 377 : 6–10).

In the evenings people lit lamps and sprayed the lamp with grains and worshipped them. They went also to temples for worship. Brahmins performed oblations at dusk and dawn. Beds of the different classes, according to status, are described. The false ceiling or *vitāna* over a queen's cot was decorated with *candrā* (moon shown in conjunction with Rohiṇī, his favourite star) thus giving a side-light of the astronomical knowledge of the people. Time was announed by the hour, by time-keepers.

Among the customs and traditions of the common folk, we find mention of the institution of Brahmins for the rituals and other cult functions, with Vēlan as the folk-leader in the indigenous cults of exorcising devils etc. People had superstitious beliefs, and faith in getting *Kuri* (or clairvoyant decree), expiation etc. The former was catered to by the person known as *Kaṭṭuvicci* (a female). Auspicious signs, sounds and events were also considered as influencing one's activities. Vēlan, already mentioned, was approached for oracular message and he would go into a trance after a wild dance, and when regaining his consciousness, would foretell events. For fixing marriage functions, the bad aspects of hostile planets were eschewed and the conjuction of moon with Rohiṇī was selected.

Deciding a good augury by bird sounds, lizard sounds etc. was also common. Simil rly the throbbing of the left or right eye, left or right shoulder, left or right thigh, and the itching of the left or right

palm or sole of feet, were interpreted as favourable or unfavourable signs. Dreams were similarly viewed. Wives did not follow husbands in their overseas trips, or when going to battle. Women did not generally dress and decorate themselves prettily during their husbands' absence from house. Women liked brave men and warriors to be their husbands. By '*dāya*' rights the children inherited paternal rights (*Tol. Poruḷ*. 25), but property generally descended only to the son from father (*Puṛam* 9–11). Women liked gossip and joined in small groups for this and spoke more through their eyes and hand signs than by words (*Naṛṛ*. 149 : 1–5).

Among deadly sins, killing cows, harassing or wounding Brahmins and abortions were on the top of the list (*Puṛam* 34 : 1–7). Brahmins had the right to advise the king on administration of the kingdom (*Tol. Poruḷ. Marabu* : 83). A social consciousness pervaded the attitude of the people in all walks of life, and righteousness, god-fearing, native service-mindedness and discerning patronage of the poor by the rich and the royal were the prevailing norms.

CHAPTER IV

RELIGION: CREEDS AND BELIEFS

As in many other parts of the country, the early religion in Tamilnāḍ stemmed from the belief in a supernatural being who had potentialities of good and evil and thus was to be feared as much as respected (*Padiṟṟ*. 21 : 5). Thus the 'fear of God' has been at the root of religious discipline. This God was omnipresent. There were, however, special or favoured god-heads in the five physiographic divisions, who were Māl (Viṣṇu), Muruga or Kārttikēya, Indra, Varuṇa and Durgā respectively. Besides these, there were the three-eyed God (Śiva), Balarāma and Kriṣṇa, not to mention the affiliated minor gods and goddesses like Śrī, Brahmā, Cupid (Manmatha), Umā. The minor gods were as much resident in the sylvan and hilly tracts, and in the town common as in the houses themselves. Before we deal with the broader set-up of the entire pantheon, we may perhaps describe the respective professed gods of *Mullai*, *Kuṟiñji*, *Marudam*, *Neydal* and *Pālai*. The reason for the transposition of *Mullai* first is the fact that its God Māl (Viṣṇu) was by far the most popular and widely mentioned divinity and is closely followed by Muruga, the god of *Kuriñji*. *Tolkāppiyam* itself has proclaimed this priority (*Tol. poruḷ. Aham* 5).

MĀL (VISNU) OF MULLAI TRACT.

There are copious references in the Śaṅgam works to Tirumāl (Viṣṇu), His forms, painted figures, His vehicles, banner, weapons, deeds, incarnations. The stature of Tirumāl was tall. His complexion that of the waterladen cloud or the deep sea. He has a resplendent crown on His head, He is clad in brilliant yellow silken robes, He wears floral garlands, *tuḷasi mālā*, and other golden ornaments outstanding among which is the divine gem called *kaṣtubha maṇi*. His appearance is compared to the rainbow against a blue cloudy sky. He ever bears Śrī on his chest. From His navel, rises Brahmā on a lotus stalk who carries out the chores of creation. Tirumāl bears *chrkra* on His right hand and conch on His left, and also carries bow and arrow. His eyes and feet are as soft and endearing

as the lotus. Devotees have a firm belief that meditating on His feet would eliminate rebirth in this world (*Pari.* 3 : 2). His vehicle is Garuḍa who serves as His banner as well (*Puṟam* 56 : 6). Tirumāl equally well appropriates to Himself the banner of palm tree, plough weapon, elephant vehicle. The learned men as well as the lay shepherds sing His praise. Tirumāl temples have been noted at Irundaiyūr, Kulavi, Tiruvaraṅgam, Tiruvehka, Trivandrum, Tirumāliruñjōlai etc. Many stanzas exist of the last where Tirumāl is found together with Balarāma. *Paripāḍal* reveals that Tirumāl (Viṣṇu) is the unified form of the five emanations Śaṅkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, Aniruddha, and Sāmba with Vāsudeva (in the middle) and becomes the *pañchamūrti.* Of His other forms, the Anantaśayi, the standing form, and the Varāha incarnation come up for glorified mention in the same work, in addition to His stance with Balarāma as mentioned in *Puṟam* (58 : 14–16). Balarāma is a white-complexioned God comparable to milk and conch. He wears a *kuṇḍala* on one ear. His weapon is the plough, His banner is palm tree as well as elephant. Śrī is of ruddy complexion, resident in the lotus with two elephants pouring water over Her from pots, as Gajalakṣmī (*Neḍunal.* 81 : 83). She is the presiding deity of wealth and prosperity. Bhūdevī or Goddess of earth also consorted with Viṣṇu, when He took Varāhāvatāra and resuscitated Her from the nether waters (*Paripāḍal* 2 : 32-35). Ādiśeṣa is the couch of Viṣṇu. He has 1000 heads. He bears the weight of the world in his hood. At Irundaiyūr, there was a temple for him where people thronged for worship. Garuḍa, the enemy of snakes, is mentioned as being decorated with snakes as ornaments on his body. Even his pride was curbed once by Viṣṇu. His mother was Vinatā whom he redeemed from bondage. Brahmā, by virtue of his duties, was called the grand old god. He has four heads. He was also the creator of the Vedas. These Vedas were called the 'spoken word'. He is also known as Vidhi (*Pari.* 3 : 6). Kāma (Cupid or Aniruddha) and Sāma (Sāmba) were sons of Viṣṇu. Both are dark complexioned ; Cupid's banner was that of *makara* or shark. His *lāñcana* or cognizance is also fish. He wields a bow of sugarcane and arrows of *aravinda* (lotus), aśoka, mango, *navamallikā* (*mullai*), and *nilōtpala* (lily) flowers. His troupe comprises lovely damsels. His consort is Rati or Venus. *Paripāḍal* (19 : 48–49)

mentions Cupid and Rati having been painted in the art gallery at Tirupparankunṟam (near Madurai). There were also separate temples for him. In spring, there was a great festival in his honour (*Kalitt*. 36 : 9–10 ; 92 : 67–68).

Among the incarnations of Viṣṇu, Varāha, Hamsa, Trivikrama Narasimha, Rāma and Kriṣṇa are well known. The last two, of course, are frequently and extensively detailed. Sītā's capture by Ravaṇa and Rāma crossing the sea to Laṅkā are mentioned (*Puṟam*. 378 : 9–22 and *Aham* 70 : 13–16). Similarly Kriṣṇa's *līlas* as the Gōpāla or shepherd captivating the milk maids, *Gōpī Vastrāharaṇa* (*Aham* 59 : 3–6), killing of Keśi demon, His residence at Dwārakā (*Puṟam* 201 : 7–12), His vanquishing the *mallas* (wrestlers), His vouchsafing divine grace (*Madurai*. 761–763), His assisting Pāṇḍavas to victory in the Bhārata battle (*Puṟam* 2: 13–16), are all mentioned. Among other Purāṇic legends of Viṣṇu's exploits, mention is also found of the distribution of nectar by Viṣṇu to Dēvas.

MURUGAN OF KUṞIÑJI TRACT

Paripāḍal and *Tirumurugāṟṟuppaḍai* deal in extenso with the birth and exploits of Muruga. They refer to Tripurāntaka consorting with Umā and begetting Skanda, Indra trying to destroy the embryo, the six divine mothers sustaining the same and producing the child on the lotus pond born on top of the Himalayas, Indra confronting the new born but getting vanquished and later becoming the main support and devotee of Muruga. With fire-like red colour, with six heads and twelve arms, Muruga travels on the peacock although his alternate vehicle is the elephant. He has the cock' banner. The most important weapon of His is the spear (*vēl*), and it is extolled profusely in the various classics (*Puṟam* 380 : 12 : *Kuṟiñji* 51–52 etc). *Murngāṟṟuppaḍai* and *Puripāḍal* specify for the 12 hands, the weapons of goad, spear, *vaira* (or thunderbolt), bow and arrow, axe, fire, sword, rosary, cock, ram, many of which has been supplied to Him by the Dēvas.

Muruga is fiery and tempestuous. He is the Commander-in-chief of the Devas' army. Among the demons killed by Him, Śūra was the most outstanding ; and this is detailed in *Puṟam* (23 : 3–7),

Padiṟṟuppattu (11 : 16), *Kalittogai* (26 : 15–16) etc. Next in popularity is his piercing the Krauñca hill (*Murugā*. 256 ; *Paripāḍal* 8–29). Indra gave his daughter Dēvasēnā in marriage to Muruga. Later at Tirupparankunram, He woos and weds the tribal maiden Vaḷḷi in the *gāndharva* type of marriage. Murugan torments young maidens and to get over their distress, they request Vēlan, the cult-priest, to organise the Muruga worship, wild dances and the trance. Muruga was worshipped by the Brahmins as well as the other people. Of the temple sites sacred to Him the Tirupparankunṯṟam, Tiruchendūr, Tiruvāvinankuḍi, Tiruvēraham, and other places are elaborated with great gusto in *Murugāṟṟuppaḍai*, although *Puram*. *Aham* and *Paripāḍal* also refer to the first two.

INDRA OR VĒNDAN OF THE MARUDAM TRACT

The *Marudam* folk performed the Indra festival every year, and we learn from *Śilappadikāram* and *Maṇimēkalai*, the post–Śaṅgam works, that this festival was spread over 28 days (i.e., a lunar month). *Aiṅguṟunūru* and *Padiṟṟuppattu* deal elaborately with the character of the Indra festival in *Marudam* towns. Indra is mentioned as the guardian of the northern mountain Mēru. He is the performer of a hundred sacrifices (*Muruga*. 155–56). He is of a thousand eyes. He is the wielder of *vajra* or thunderbolt (*Puṟam* 341 : 3). He rides on a four-tusked divine elephant. He is the imbiber of the celestial ambrosia along with the Dēvas. Brave warriors after death proceed to *Indralōka* and live there in perpetual happiness. The lewd interlude of Indra with Ahalyā, the wife of Gautama, in the latter's absence (by a strategem) and the sequel to it in the form of a curse to bear a thousand eyes had been synoptically painted in the art gallery at Tirupparankunṟam and people enthusiastically followed the narrative and commented on it, as we have it on the authority of *Paripāḍal* (19 : 50–53).

Varuṇa, the deity of the Neydal tract : was also called the god of the ocean, and people of the sea coast planted the shark's backbone and worshipped it symbolically praying to Varuṇa.

KOṞṞAVAI (DURGĀ) OF THE PĀLAI TRACT

She was the fighting female potential of the three-eyed God (Śiva) and was thus the presiding deity of victory in battle. She was worshipped by the hill tribes and predatory classes. She wields the great trident in Her hand. She vanquished Mahiṣāsura. Her temple was situated in the midst of a forest and was protected by ghosts, ghouls and spirits (*Paṭṭina*. 57–59). The hill tribes offered animal sacrifice to Her and wore also a wrist band of thread during such offering. The places where she resides are mentioned as Ayiraimalai and Vinda-malai. *Padiṟṟuppattu* gives details about the former place. The latter place is also referred to as Kaḍavuṭ-periya-kānam and was clearly the Vindhya forest, as explained by the commentaries also. Durgā as Vindhyavāsini was obviously referred to here.

The most outstanding among the gods, in the eyes of the people, were the three-eyed (Śiva), the palm-bannerer (Balarāma), Tirumāl and Muruga, and it is not without significance that these gods have been shown up as the analogues for the ire, mettle, glory and resolution of the Pāṇḍyan king Ilavandikaippaḷḷi-t-tuñjiya Nanmāṟan. The duties of creation, protection and destruction were considered as distributed among the Trinity. Further Brahmā is taken as having produced the 12 Ādityas, the two Aśvins, the eight Vasus, 12 Rudras, the guardians of quarters and all other gods, angels and sages (*Pari.* 8 : 1–11). There is even a lurking reference to Paraśurāma a *Maḷuvāl Neḍiyōn* (*Aham* 220–5 ; *Madurai*. 457–58).

Of Śiva, we learn that He is ruddy. He is decorated with *Campaka* blossoms. He wears matted locks which fall on his shoulders. Within the locks is imprisoned the Gaṅgā stream and on it glitters the crescent moon (*Puṟam* 126 : 1 and 91 : 5). His neck is distinguished by the black stain, born of His having graciously accepted to swallow the hālahāla poison (*Puṟam* 91 : 6; *Malaipaḍu* 83). He rides on a white bull and has a bull banner as well. His chief weapon is called *Kaṇicci* – a kind of splayed axe head, which shines like fire. As Tripurāntaka, He wields a bow and arrow as well (*Puṟam* 55 : 1–3). He had shared His body with Umā (and is thus Ardhanāriśvara) and is thus a *bhōgi* residing on Mount Kailas (*Murugā*. 153 : *Kali*. 38 : 1–7). He is equally well-known as the *yogi*

Dakṣiṇāmūrti under the banyan tree (*Kali* 100 : 78). The Vedas sprang from His speech. He also accepts on behalf of the Dēvas the *havis* (or offerings made in fire) by the pious in their religious sacrifices.

We have references to Rāvaṇa's discomfiture while he tried to lift Mount Kailās, and his subsequent obeisance and receipt of the grace of Śiva (*kali.* 38 : 1–5). His important shrines have been mentioned in king Nannan's *Naviraimālai* (*Malaipaḍu.* 81–82), *Ālamuṟṟam* (*Aham* 181 : 14–20) etc.

DĒVAS AND GAÑAS

The celestial stratification of the divinities is also alluded to in the Śaṅgam literature. The Dēvas who do not wink or close their eyes in sleep (*Madurai.* 582) reside on the Mēru mountain top. There were many immortal sources of happiness like Kalpaka grove, Kāmadhēnu etc., in the celestial world. Among the Dēvas are enumerated the distinctive thirty-three. These comprise the twelve Ādityas, the Marut twins, the eight Vasus and the eleven Rudras. All these were created by Brahmā. *Paripāḍal* details these as already noted (8 : 2–11). In addition, we had such classes as the Aśura, Garuḍa, Gandharva, Bhūta, Piśāca and Taṟagaṇa, forming eighteen groups in all. The eight guardians of the quarters (consisting of Indra, Agni, Yama, Niṟruti, Varuṇa, Vāyu, Kubēra and Iśāna) are also mentioned by *Paripāḍal* (8 : 7). The prowess or the features of each of these are sometimes detailed (*Puṟam* 41 : 16–18 ; *Aham* 66 : 17 etc.). It is rather peculiar that in the Śaṅgam verses, Yama appropriates more attention than even Indra. Many synonymous names have been given to Yama, such as Kālan, Dharman, Erumai (buffalo) amidst others (*Kali.* 105 : 20–21 ; *Pari.* 3 : 8 ; *Puṟam.* 6 : 8–10 ; 42 : 23). He also wields a long spear or axe. He has been mentioned as vanquished by Muruga (*Pari.* 8 : 86) as well as by Śiva (*Kali.* 121 : 24–26). The sun and the moon were the most immediately perceived and worshipped among the demigods (*Aham* 239 : 9–10 ; *Madurai.* 193–194 : *Naṟṟi.* 283 : 5–7). Among the constellations some came in for specific respect or popularity. Rōhiṇi when in conjunction with Candra was considered most auspicious, as mentioned already. *Śravaṇa* and *Ārdrā* stars were identified with

Viṣṇu and Śiva and were considered very sacred. Similarly *Krittikā* was associated with Muruga. A festival of illuminations was gone through in the dark fortnight of Kāritika month (*Aham* 141 : 6-8). The Great Bear or *Saptariṣi maṇḍala* was also duly worshipped. Along with them, the Arundhatī star was called *Vaḍamīn* (northern star) and held out as the ideal for feminine chastity and duly worshipped.

NATURE WORSHIP AND THE SPIRITS

As already noted, the immanence of the divine power in hill, vale, water and grove was implicitly believed in by the people, and particularly trees like palm, neem, banyan, senna, etc., were held as possessing divinity, and their base or trunk was worshipped accordingly. References to these are many.

Similarly, water and water nymphs are mentioned, the latter believed to be not visible to the naked eye (*Aham* 342 : 11–12) and are called *aṇaṅgu*, *śūr* etc. It was believed that they affected some adversely and the victim suffered from shivers (*Kuṟun*. 52 : 2). Again, Pāvai Goddess residing in Kollimalai was connoted as installed by God himself in portrait and given to causing evil effects (*Aham* 62 : 12–16). Her beauteous mien is also sometimes extolled (*Naṟṟ*. 201 : 10–11).

Belief in spirits, similarly gave rise to such conceptions like ghouls, ghosts, devils, etc., which were classified into many categories. They were all nocturnal spirits and were horrid to the mind's eye. The appearance of a ghoul's head being similar to *Kēteki* tree is mentioned (*Aham* 130 : 4). They are also of the look of a fork of a tree. Their eyes are immense, they are ruddy and cruel. They are held as wearing white goat's skin and have a fiery tongue and long irregularly placed teeth, appearing like elephant nails. They have cleft hoofs and thin, dried fingers (*Madurai*. 121 and 161 ; *Śiṟupāṇ*. 196–7 ; *Naṟ*. 73 : 2 ; *Kuṟu*. 180 : 1).

While ghouls are short and ride on ghouls, ghosts are of huge form. These spirits are mentioned as frequenting battle fields and preying on the dead bodies and dancing in devilish glee (*Aham* 265 : 14–15 ; *Puṟam* 359 : 45). The jungle paths and crossways where

they reside and molest travellers were the venues of sacrificial offerings of sheep for exorcising the spirits. It was ardently believed that if the offerings were periodically given to the devils, they left the people alone (*Padiṟṟ*. 71 : 23–24). Thus the concept that these spirits are not really killers but they only worry and harass people and get from them ceremonial offerings, would be apparent.

URBAN DEITIES

Even in towns and villages, the public square, the village common, the house courtyards and the narrow crossings, some minor gods were believed to be residing and worshipped. Of these, the village common where there was a tree under which people gathered on festive or important days was held as the chief seat of the demi-gods. Further the main halls of meeting (*podiyil*) in the towns were also installed with a wooden pillar called '*kandu*' that was worshipped. Many references to this '*kandu*' in the town halls which attracted strangers to the town, and damsels brought as hostages in war by kings to serve as worshippers at this spot would show that this pillar which had a dark lower body, probably due to the paste and unguents applied to it, was a specific symbol of worship, like the *yūpa* pillar or the *Śivaliṅga*. The house doors were similarly considered as the favourite places of residence of Pāvai and were thus decorated with designs and pastes and given offerings (*Madurai*. 353–54; *Neḍunal*. 86 : *Aham* 369 : 7–8).

FORMS OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP

Above all, we note that regular temples of God were known where people offered worship in groups all round the year. Sandal and other fragrant pastes, incense, flowers etc., were the types of offerings to the gods during worship. The food offerings included milk, rice, oblations etc. The various forms of gods mentioned would show that formal or representational worship was the order of the day (*Kuṟiñji* 5–7). Flowers like *Navamallikā*, *Kurunda*, cassia, lily and *Arka* were the more favoured flowers. The most worthy was, however, the lotus. It is also found that flowers were interleaved with fragrant herbs, in the garlands and offered to the gods.

The hero-stones and royal insignia were ceremonially bathed on occasions. There were regular sacrificial platforms where the flowers food, living object or grain sacrifices were held. Chanting hymns during such offerings is also noted (*Padiṟṟ* 30 : 33–35). Drums, conches and music etc. were also played on such occasions. The daytime offerings were differentiated from the eventide offerings. The latter are spoken of as belonging to the temples of Śiva, Viṣṇu etc. Festivals of gods were a regular feature, when people from the adjoining villages thronged in their thousands. People dressed well on these occasions. Divine forms were taken in procession on the streets. Fixing the inauguration hour of the festivals, arranging for its announcement, providing for music, drama and dance on such days, were all specified. The festivals generally took place in the bright lunar fortnight. On the seventh day of the festivities there was a largescale bath in water courses nearby (*Aham* 17 : 19–20; *Madurai*. 427–430). Accounts of such festivals held at Tirupati, Uṟaiyūr, Madurai, Tirupparankunṟam, Kāvērippaṭṭinam etc., are available in the classics.

RELIGIOUS CREEDS

A considerable philosophical basis had evolved already among men about divinities and their role, in relation to living beings. The five vital elements, the nine planets, the good and evil forces, all these were held as having emanated from Nārāyaṇa, as mentioned in the Vedas (*Pari*. 3 : 1–14). The myth of creation by Viṣṇu of Brahmā and through him the gamut of creatures, was familiar. They also held that the divinity that creates also destroys the world at the close of an aeon. The Trinity were, however, counted as complementary to one another and formed a triune manifestation of the same vital God-head (*Pari*. 1 : 46–49 ; 8 : 1–3). The manifestation of God in all things, animate as well as inanimate, was also fully understood. His own incarnations and doings for the good of the world were countless and a mystery surrounds His very visitations and immanence. He is not created by any one but manifests Himself of His own sweet will (*Pari*. 3 : 68–72). Notwithstanding the various forms in which He is worshipped. He is in the ultimate analysis as formless as He is limitless in dimensions (*Pari*. 3 : 45). Viṣṇu was held as by far the most basic of universal divine principles ; He rules the worlds,

with His grace as the royal umbrella and righteousness or eternal principles as the sceptre (*Pari.* 3 : 73–76). Heathens who did not worship any God were also listed. People who revel in killing life, the hard-hearted, the wrathful, the wicked, the practitioners of questionable rites and orgies were all listed under this. The emanation of *ākāśa*, then wind, fire, water and land has been adumbrated even in *Tolkāppiyam* and the last, namely, the land mass was raised from under the waters by Viṣṇu as Varāha (*Pari.* 2L 1–19 ; *Madurai.* 453–455). The entire globe was divided into three main parts and each of these subdivided into seven categories. The empyrean was itself at the very top and below it were the heavens, the sky and the earth (*Puṟam* 5 : 5–7). Earth was surrounded by the seas and divided into nine parts or continents (*Kali.* 143 : 13–14). Of these, the Tamil country was held to be part of the *nāvalan taṇ poḻil* (*Jambū-dvīpa*).

The organic evolution of living beings, their birth, growth, decay and death were all well accepted. The residence of the soul in the body was compared to that of a bird in its nest. When danger confronts it, the bird leaves one cage for another (*Aham* 71 : 16–18). There is nothing like an even tenor in life cycle. It rises and falls ; a pauper becoming king by God's grace and *vice versa.* Thus transmigration of souls and the concept of *karma* following man to its logical conclusion have been fully realised and set store by.

It was also believed that each soul had to be reborn at least seven times (*Pari.* 11 : 120–121). This concept also occurs in the hymns of Āḻvārs. Life is compared to a dream and to the shadow of a discharged dart, and the burning ground was considered as the place where the impermanence of body was demonstrated. Nothing but righteous actions live (*Puṟam* 165, 156 : 1–2 ; *Naṟṟi.* 46 : 1–2). Good begets good and evil begets evil was already a well-known maxim and the implication was that even if one had no opportunity for doing good evil ways could be avoided and this itself was held as righteousness (*Puṟam* 195 : 6–7). An interesting sequel to this was the injunction that good men should not consort with non-believers (*Puṟam* 29 : 11–12). It was held on all grounds that salvation *(vīḍu)* was the ultimate goal of all men. Thus living with a lofty ideal, avoiding evil, always endeavouring to do a good turn were the elements of the exemplary type of life that was considered a most worthy model.

VEDIC RELIGION AND RITUAL

It is to be understood at this context that the four Vedic branches of Brahmanical religion were already having a place in the Tamil society. The Vedas were mentioned as 'the ancient,' the 'unwritten axiom', the 'heard' etc. The four Vedas being carried down by word of mouth through generations of the orthodox Brahmin was well known. The six Vēdāṅgas like *śikṣā*, *vyākaraṇa* etc., were also understood. Besides these, the Upaniṣads were also studied.

The Brahmins performed Vedic fire sacrifices and worshipped their gods. We have many useful gleanings about their method of *homa*, the materials that were necessary for them etc. For instance, in the sacrifices or *yagñas* 21 different categories have been understood. Ghee was profusely poured over the sacrificial fire and *havis* (cooked offerings of food) were also thrown into the *kuṇḍa* (*Puṟam* 166 : 8–9 ; 19–23 ; 384 : 15–18 ; 15 : 17–21). Those who perform *yāgās* are believed to ascend to heaven. *Āhuti* or the act of offering into the fire is mentioned as *āvudi* (*Madurai*. 494–495). People visited sacrificial halls and worshipped fire god. Kings had been there who had caused many sacrifices to be performed, such as Pal Yāgaśālai Mudukuḍumi Peruvaḻuti (*Madurai*. 759–760), Neḍuñcheḻiyan and Chōla Karikālan. Ritual pavilions, with *yūpa* pillars fixed, are also mentioned (*Puṟam* 15 : 21). We have a king called Rāyasūyam Vēṭṭa Perunarkiḷḷi (*Puṟam* 16 : 25, 366 : 377) showing Rājasūya Yagña was also well known. *Padiṟṟuppattu* similarly expatiates on the *yāgas* performed under the patronage of King Ādan, Peruñchēralirumpoṟai who had the title Palyānai śelkeḻukuṭṭuvan, Śelvakkaḍuṅgō Vaḻi (20 : 70 ; 74). Further Atiyamān Neḍumān Añji, Pārivaḷḷal and other smaller chieftains are also extolled for their having munificently supported Vedic sacrifices and religion (*Madurai*. 200–204).

OTHER CREEDS OF NON-HINDU CHARACTER

Of the anti-Brahmanical creeds and religions, we have references to Jainism and Buddhism which had entered Tamilnāḍ from the north. Describing the features of Kāvēripaṭṭinam, *Paṭṭinappālai* mentions the Jain and Buddhist institutions that flourished there (*Paṭṭ*. 53). There is also reference to elders taking their family and

children to Buddhist churches and offering worship, as in *Maduraik-kañji* (461–467).

The Jain institutions contained both householder *śāvakas (śrāvakas)* who worship Jina with flowers, incense, and ascetic Jains who reside in *Puḷḷis*, who could meditate and envision the past, present and the future. These ascetics practise the austerity of starvation and non-bathing and are thus seen appearing unkempt and shrunken (*Madurai*. 475–478 ; *Aham* 123 : 1–4). The occurrence of names like Bōdiyār, Iḷambōdiyār, Ulōccanār etc. among the poets perhaps suggests their Jain affiliation. These Jain and Buddhist creeds had stressed non-violence, impermanence of this world, asceticism and austere living ; we have many verses dwelling on these themes. The *Puṟam* passage (166 : 5) should perhaps be taken to support the deep-rooted antagonism existing between Vedic Brahmanism and these Jain and Buddhist creeds.

Thus we find in the Śaṅgam classics a large body of references for an understanding of religions and cults that prevailed then. These references leave us in no doubt about the deep percolation of Brahmanism of the Āryans of the north, their pantheon, rituals, and beliefs. These beliefs, mingling with the local totemistic, animistic, naturalistic beliefs, superstitions and myths were able to influence them towards a coalescence. Such a coalescence made for a social elevation of the indigenous creeds and for a cultural metamorphosis of the northern religious beliefs in a new context. The dominance of Viṣṇu worship, the fundamental friendliness with which northern Āryan religion was adopted by the local people to suit their own thinking, the high and respected place given to Brahmins and Vedic rituals in the society by kings and commoners alike would be indicators of the evolved character of the society itself. The considerable references to the Northern scriptures, epics Purāṇas and cosmogony would have no meaning if they are not taken to suggest a chronologically posterior context for their arrival in Tamilnāḍ from north. Such a proposition upholds the age of the Śaṅgam classics, on the lines already dealt with elsewhere.

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CHAPTER V

ARTS, CRAFTS AND SCIENCES

It goes without saying that the social structure of the Śaṅgam classics was fully open to the aesthetic perception of nature, to a conscious cultivation of the fine arts and to a discerning application of arts to technical crafts, resulting in a becoming sophistication and genteel living.

Of these we should note that the people having risen from the indigenous and almost tribal life had a traditional bias for music and dance and folklore. It was in their very blood. It was only enlarged and perfected, consistently with the urban life and a deliberate cultivation of the social graces. The rhythms of natural phenomena themselves produced a romantic ebb in their hearts and their instinctive predilection was for the sights and sounds of nature, like the hum of the bee, or the spatter of the rain or the echo of a cascade or waterfall or the lowing sound of the cattle; all this made for a fulness and a sense of well-being in their lives. They perceived the tone of musical instruments like lyre or flute in the bee's buzzing or the dove's cooing, and even the elephant's blaring or a frog's croaking made them recall one or another instrumental musical note (*Aiṅg*. 215 : 3–4 ; 425 : 1–2 ; *Kuṛun*. 193 : 1–3). The soft voice of a human being was immediately compared by them to the twang of the harp (*Aham*. 109 : 1–2). Sometimes their sense of realism and wry humour caused them to compare the harp's or flute's note with the weeping of a lady (*Puṛam*. 143 : 15; *Naṛṛ*. 13 : 11). It was fully realised that the influence of music was such as to move even the stone-hearted to pity and love. It was actually held that the fine music of a lyre tended to force the bandits to forsake their assault weapons, and express their inherent potentiality for violence (*Porunar*. 20–22). Wild and intoxicated rut elephants were observed to get under control by the influence of plaintive and heart-enthralling notes of rich music (*Kali*. 2 : 26–27). The sublimating effect of the lyre's tunes was considered such as to make certain animals stand rooted to the spot hearing this music, and any jarring interruption by a sudden beating of the drum would kill the sensitive animal on the spot (*Kali*. 143 :

10–12). Thus the tender emotions let loose under the chastening influence of soft musical notes, brought harmony between men and women, and subdued their anger and rigidity and created warmth of feeling.

Musical instruments over a wide range of types, namely, string, wind and percussion categories were known to the then society. The more important were *yāḻ* (lyre) (*Puṟam.* 152 : 14); flute (*Aham.* 10: 13); *muḻā* or *muḻavu* (*Puram.* 152 : 14), *taṇṇumai* (*Aham.* 106 : 12–13), *muraśu* (drum), *parai* (kettle drum) (*Malaipaḍu.* 321), *paḍalai* (*Malaipadu.* 11), *kiṇai* (*Puṟam.* 392 : 5), *taḍāri* (*Puṟam.* 398 : 12), *tuḍi* (*Puṟam.* 287: 1), *mattari* (*Pari.* 12: 41), *ellari* (*Puṟam.* 114 : 15), *vayir* (*Murug.* 120), *kōḍu* (*Aham.* 94 : 10–11), *tumbu* (*Puṟam.* 114: 15), *śaṅgu* (conch) (*Mullai.* 92; *Kuṟun.* 15 : 1) etc. Of these *vayir* is a long trumpet-like instrument and is also known by the other two names *kōḍu* and *tumbu.* It is made out of a bamboo tube and resembles the trunk of an elephant. People in charge of scaring away birds and rodents that pick the fully grown corn stalk in the fields use this instrument (*Aham.* 94 : 10–11). The flute had five or seven perforations (*Pari.* 8 : 20). Shepherds invariably keep it for leading their herds and locating them. The sound of the shepherd flute gathering cattle back to village was heard at dusk, floating through the air.

Yāḻ or lyre was of two kinds, the small and the big, viz., *śiri yāḻ* and *peri yāḻ* (*Śiṟupāṇ.* 34–35 etc). The components of a *yāḻ* are *maruppu, pattal, vāy, pōrvai, tivavu* or *varikkaṭṭu, kaḍai ani* etc. These have been explained at length in *Porunarāṟṟuppaḍai* and *Śirupāṇāṟṟuppaḍai.* The guts used as strings were like well-made gold wires and were fixed with tension. The wires were either pricked or pulled or slurred over by the fingers to produce different pitches and notes (*Naṟṟ.* 335 : 9–10; *Porun.* 23–24). The *yāḻ* was kept resting on the left shoulder of the player, the left arm hugging it. *Paṟai, muraśu, taṇṇumai* are all percussion instruments covered with animal skin.

Muraśu or drum was a very large instrument and was a sign of royalty which had the three drums : the drum of justice, the drum of valour and the drum of sacrifice (*Puṟam* 58 : 12–13). *Pāri* and *akuli* are smaller types of drums. *Paḍalai* is a drum with a single eye. · It

is also called *kiṇari*. It has the shape of the elephant's foot (*Puṛam* 152 : 17). *Taḍāri* appears to be shaped like the full moon and is thus a small drum. All these are played with a short and slightly crooked stick. Generally the skin cover is seasoned with oil and unguents called *maṇ* (*Puṛam*. 152 : 14). *Tuḍi* is played by the fingers and palm, *ellari* is also called *śalli* (*Malaipaḍ*. 10). *Pāṇḍil* is a *kañja tāḷā* made of bronze plates, and is the cymbal (*Malaipaḍu*. 4). It is also called *makuli* (*Pari*. 12 : 41). The musical instruments were duly provided with sheaths for protection and durability (*Aham*. 189 : 13). Putting various instruments in a kit bag and carrying them about was common. Such a bag was known as *kalappai* (*Malai*. 12 : 13). Celestial music was a concept and it was held that righteous people, as for instance the Āy, were welcomed in Indra's abode with the beating of drums and music.

Musical note was of a seven pitched range (*Madurai*. 559–561). Each of these had the loud, low and normal variations of *sthāna ;* we may compare this with Vālmīki's statement put in the mouth of Hanumān in Rāvaṇa's palace (*suśrāva madhuram gītam tristhāna svara-bhūṣitam*). Experts in music sung in modulations of the note involving all these seven pitches and triple variations of each, and disciplined them through the marking of the time-element—*tāḷa* (*Pari*. 10 : 24–25). Rhythmic variations of notes were called '*Paṇṇuppeyerttal*' (*Madurai*. 560). Ripples of musical notes were called '*muraṛkai*' (*Aiṅg*. 407 : 2). The instrumental musicians were called '*īyavar*' (*Aiṅg*. 215 : 3 ; *Naṛṛ*. 123 : 10–11). The *tāḷa* or time-mark also had three states such as *pāṇi*, *tūkku* and *śīr* (*Kali*. 1). A melodic phrase was called a '*paṇ*' ; the *paṇs* varied in their symphony depending upon the hour of the day and content of the musical text. We have, for instance, references to the morning *paṇ* which was called *Marudam* and the eveing *paṇ* which was spoken of as *Śevvāli* (*Madurai*. 688 : *Puṛam* 149 : 2–4 ; *Kali*. 143 : 38–41). A dirge or mournful *paṇ* called *viḷari* is also mentioned. Since we have such other names as the *Kuṛiñji Paṇ* and *Mullai-p-paṇ*, these, when considered with *Marudam* given above, would suggest a physiographic basis also for the incidence of the *paṇs*. We have such literary *paṇs* as *Kāmaram* or *Śīkāmaram* and *naivālam* (*śiṛupāṇ* : 27, 36–37). The practice of intoning to the discipline of the *taḷa* and time the choreographic accompaniment to it was also

known (*Pari.* 10: 56). Marking time by clapping palm with palm has also found mention (*Pari.* 12 : 40–44; 7 : 77–80). There were musical treatises which dealt with the intricacies of the musical phraseology and specified their grammar (*Aham* 352 : 13–15). These were learned avidly and imbibed by the *pāṇas* or the musical mendicants.

The play and the dance were the favourite of men and women alike (*Kuṟun.* 31 : 4). However, mostly women took to dancing (*Pari.* 7 : 17). The venue or stage of the dance or play was called the '*āḍukaḷam*' or '*araṅgu*' (*Kuṟu.* 31 : 4). Those who came to the stage and danced or played on it were called the dramatists or the dancing girls (*Puṟam* 55; *Aham* 82 : 10). Plays used to be conducted in the first half of the night and people thronged to see such musical troupes. Kapilar has very faithfully pictured the events connected with the singing and dancing of the girls on the stage, comparing them with nature's own graceful features. He says peacocks dance in the hill slope, rich with bamboo shafts. They are like the dancing girls. The bamboo shafts, having been pierced by swarms of bees, produce sonorous sound ripples when the summer wind rustles through them. The cataract nearby with its rumble produced the drum accompaniment.

The hosts of horned deer which ramble in these jungles and raise sounds resemble the *tūmbu* or the trumpet. The bees imbibing the fresh honey of the forest flowers raise a hum which is like that of the lyre. The dance of the peacock in such an environment is enjoyed by the groups of monkeys.

The stage plays were of many kinds *Vallikkūttu* (*Perum.* 370–371; *Tol–Poruḷ—Puṟam* : 5), *pēḍikkūttu* (*Aham* 206 : 2–3), *kaḷaikkūttu* (*Naṟṟ.* 95 : 1–2), *kuḍakkūttu* (*Pari.* 3 : 83) etc. Apart from such special musical performances by dancing girls, women in general sang even while they worked in the field, on the de-husking mortar, or while playing on the swing, and these are variously called the *vaḷḷai* song and the *ūśal* song. The songs incorporated in the *kuravaikkūttu* or the group dance of girls and lads was called '*koṇḍunilai-śeyyuḷ*' (*Kali.* 39 : 26–29). Poets and professional musicians composed many songs in praise of their patrons and in various other contexts of life and

a rich repertoire of folk music was thus built up by the people. The girls who take part in *kuravaikkūttu*, danced with hands clasped with the males and in such plays the men offered their hands first or requested the girls chosen to lend them their hands. This folk dance had been popular in all the physiographic zones (*Malaipaḍ*. 320-322). We have references to *Kuravaikkūttu*, plays by *Kuṟavas* or gypsies (*Malai*. 320–322), shepherdesses (*Kali*. 106 : 31–33), *Paradavar* or fisherfolk (*Madurai*. 96–97), field labour women (*Padiṟ*. 73 : 8–11) etc.

Personal ornamentation and toilet was also a common norm. Young ladies painted their breasts with coloured unguents in various significant and traditional designs, wore flowers, dressed with colourful costumes. They also decorated the walls of their homes as well as the town halls with various painted panels. We have references to expert painters who can paint on the walls any animated scene that one can order (*Madurai*. 516–528). A picture which is only engraved in outline and not filled up in paint is called a *punaiyā ōviyam*, undressed picture (*Neḍunal*. 147).

CRAFTS

We have already mentioned in the second chapter the wide range of craft services that were at the disposal of society for their temporal needs. These included carpenters, blacksmiths, potters, goldsmiths, the basket-makers, the weavers, florists, chank-cutters, pearl-makers, cot-makers. Apart from the actual interchange of goods that these artisans transacted with the city dwellers, it is primarily the craft-knowledge that went into these technical or applied arts that concerns us here. The smith's bellows and furnace, hammer, and the goldsmith's touchstone and ornament moulds, the potter's mineral for slip, wash and glaze, the chank-cutter's size, the pearl strand maker's drill, the weaver's shuttle and frame and cot-maker's lathe which could turn well-rounded cot legs and decorate them as well, the washerman's whitening alkaline earth, all these are indices of the considerable craft know-how that the evolved iron age metallurgical science had already bestowed upon them. Their individual specialisation in the different crafts would further show generations of such polarised activity. We have references to manuals on some of these crafts and sciences. For

instance, *Ṡiṟupāṇāṟṟuppaḍai* (239–41) mentions a cooking manual giving expositions of the various techniques of cooking and recipes invented by Bhīmasēna of the epic—a great cook by choice. We have manuals on secular house architecture. We have manuals on highway robbery and stealing and the apprehension of thieves. This was mentioned in *Maduraikkāñji* (645–47) as '*karvaṭa*'. There were works on state-craft, on righteous conduct (*Puṟam* 34 : 7), guides to animal tending and taming, useful for appreciating the instincts of elephants, horses etc. (*Aham* 400 : 5–16). We find a keen participation by poets and laymen alike in the processes of nature, deriving much good out of it. The medicinal herbs were carefully examined and they were extracted from the plants without damaging them. The plants were nursed also for perennial use. We have a clear category of physicians who ministered to the sick and the wounded (*Naṟṟ*. 135 : 2–3). They had knowledge of sutures to be applied to wounds. *Padiṟṟuppattu* refers to a scar caused by the suture of a wound on the chest of a warrior. Needles were used for such operations. The poets actually compared the insertion of the needle into the flesh for stitching a wound to the plunge of a kingfisher into the placid pool. This is apparently a reference to the quick and nimble application of the needle (*Padiṟṟ*. 42 : 1–4). Thus surgery was quite familiar to them.

In addition, we have copious references to a keen study of nature resulting in a considerable accumulation of botanical, zoological and other scientific data in the classics. Some of these observations could bear mention. The crocodile gobbles up its own young ones (*Aiṅg*. 41 : 1). The crab's maternity results in the death of the mother (*Aiṅg*. 24 : 1). The young tortoise grows by looking at the face of its mother (*Aiṅg*. 44 : 1–2). The gad fly which comes out of the hole dies within the day-time (*Puṟam* 51 : 8–11). The ant transfers its larvae to a high ground in anticipation of rains (*Puṟam*. 173 : 5–8). The crane keeps its wings close-shut in monsoon season (*Naṟṟ*. 250). The fish, though constantly moving during day-time, go to sleep at some part of the night by standing still (*Naṟṟ*. 319 : 10–11). The small-size white saw fish *Irā* in concert with many of its class can injure and wreck a wooden barge (*Aham* 152 : 6–8). The tiger,

even in the peak of its hunger, does not eat the animal it has killed if the latter fell down to its left (*Aham* 29 : 1–4). The tough elephant which can kill a tiger, charging upon hearing a tiger's roar, mistook a senna tree *(vēṅgai)* in its front for the tiger (mark the pun also here) and tore its trunk outright and decorated its forehead with the senna flowers *(Padiṟṟ*. 41 : 7–13). The bull tusker leads the group of elephants. The boar's horns are as refractory as diamond. Its hair resembles the tender shoots of bamboo *(Aham* 178 : 1–14; 122 : 7–8). The tail of the dog is always twisted to its right. The deer while drinking water sweeps away the flower, leaves etc., floating on the water by blowing air through its nostrils *(Kuṟu*. 317 : 1–4).

We have fairly good accounts of the seasonal flowers. *iruppai*, *pādiri (pāṭali)* etc., flower in summer *(Kuṟu*. 329 : 1) *koṟkai*, *pīrkku*, *kāyā* etc. flower in rainy season *(Kuṟu*. 98 : 5; 21 : 3; 183 : 5). The bean flowers in autumn, while neem flowers in late spring; the silk cotton flower is red and tongue shaped *(Aham* 142 : 1–2). *Iruppai* is white and is horn-like in shape *(Aham* 135 : 8–9). Ninety-nine flower names have altogether been referred to. The bamboo flowers in bunches and is fragrant. The lotus has needles on its stalk.

The people tried to keep themselves acquainted with the events and phenomena in neighbouring as well as far-off countries. They had certain well-set notions about geography, astronomy etc. They knew about the land mass with hills etc. surrounded by oceans and comprising the five elemental matters of land, water, air, fire and ether *(Puṟam*. 2 : 1–6). We have references to *Poṟkōṭṭu Imayam* (the Himalayas with its golden peak). This is apparently a reference to the crest Kañcaśriṅga (Kañcenjuṅga) on the Himalayas. It is of course possible that their knowledge on the northern rivers and hills was vague, based on hearsay and essentially imaginative. They place the location of Paṭaliputra on the bank of the Sone and not on Gaṅgā as we know it; perhaps it was true in their day. The fact remains that they had always considered Himalayas as a northern *ultima thub* up to which the glory of the kingdom of a sovereign was desired to extend. The knowledge about sun, moon and other planets like Jupiter, Mars, and Saturn, Mercury etc., stars, their

general movement, the new moon, the lunar eclipse, etc., is well attested to. They knew that the planetary movement was sun-centred *(Pari.* 19–46). Their computation of the time and day etc., by solar movement stands revealed *(Puṟam* 30 : 1–7). A reference is made to a chart giving sun's movement at Tirupparankuṉṟam *(Pari.* 19 : 46–47) ; the constellations and zodiacal signs such as the Aries (ram), Taurus (bull) and Gemini (pair). They also know that out of the 27 lunar constellations each of the *rāśi* or zodiacal part appropriates three *(Pari.* 4 : 3).

There are a good many references to lunar eclipses but, strange to say, none are found regarding solar eclipse, in the whole range of Śaṅgam literature. It is specifically mentioned that the lunar eclipse takes place on the full moon day *(Pari.* 10 : 75). It was held that the legendary swallowing of the moon by the cobra was relieved by Viṣṇu *(Kali.* 104 : 33–38). Certain rites performed during the eclipse session by people of different grades are also pointed out *(Kali.* 140 : 17–18 ; *Kuṟu.* 398 : 4–5). It was firmly held that owing to the almost immutable movements of the various planets, the world is continuing in its steady pace. If even anyone of the planets shows movements of the aberration, it could result in danger and catastrophe for the earth. Except for Saturn, *Rāhu* and *Kētu* which are dark, all others were considered as iuminous planets. It was also the belief that monsoon was the direct result of the planetary movements or conjunction. *Śani* was called *Maimāśi.* After the summer, the exact combination of planets which would cause rain is detailed in the *Paripāḍal* (V. 11). If 'Venus' or *Sukra* descends on the north, it was likely to cause rain *(Padiṟṟ.* 24 : 25 ; *Puṟam* 35: 6–8). Comets and meteorites were believed to cause damage to crops. Further these were considered as bad auguries for some mundane calamity. People strictly conformed themselves to the susceptibilities of the planetary positions in deciding their daily course of action. They were thus laying great faith on such supernatural or superstitious beliefs. However, people who were not within the pale of the moral codes did not perform any obsequies. Marriages were always performed on auspicious days. The diurnal movement of the sun and the nocturnal movement of the moon were known as the basis for the divisions of the day and night into forenoon, afternoon, night

and early morning respectively (*Madurai.* 7–8). The sun and the moon were considered as the very creators of the day and the night with all the associative cult significance. Side by side with the perception of the astronomical basis of day and night, the Śaṅgam folk were aware of even finer divisions of time. The wink of the eye (*imai*) was counted as the second, also equalled by the clicking of the fingers, and was the most basic time unit. The next higher span of time was *nāḷikai (nāḍikā)* also called *kannal*; and further on, there were the noon-tide, the day, the fortnight, the month, the season, the year, the millennium and the aeon. The day was also sometimes subdivided into the morning, noon and evening, or the forenoon, noon and afternoon. The night was taken as having four *yāmās*, although the corresponding Sanskrit usage for the night is *triyāmā* (or 3 *yāmās*) (*Kali.* 74 : 10–11 ; *Kurun.* 32 : 1–3 ; *Puṟam* 216 : 1–2 ; *Padiṟṟ.* 90 : 51–55 ; *Mudurai.* 20–23 ; *Aiṅg.* 482–4 ; *Pari.* 2 : 13–15). The last reference from *Paripāḍal* gives us an interesting insight into the method of counting or representing time by certain words instead of numerals, the words standing for specific numbers. This kind of word-numeral is common in *śilpa* texts where *yūga* stands for 4, *graha* stands for 9, *vasu* stands for 8 etc. The names of months in Tamil calendar now well known, such as Paṅguni (Phālguna), Tai (Māgha) and the asterisk names like Kārttikai (Krittikā), Ādira, (Ārdra), Ōṇam (Śrāvaṇ), Makhā (Makham) are quite well known in Śaṅgam classics like *Aham* (137 : 9), *Aiṇg.* (84 : 4), *Kuṟun.* (196 : 4), (*Paṟi.* 11 : 77), *Madurai.* (591) etc. and are thus seen to be of quite ancient astronomical vogue, and brought into the Tamil country.

In fact, such was the great currency of the names of the Tamil months that Tolkāppiyar has prepared a grammatical rule governing their name ending (*Tol. Eḷuttu* 45: 84). He says that it ends either in *ikāra* or *ai kāra* and so they do. Similarly for the names of the twentyseven lunar-constellations also, Tolkāppiyar frames the rule (*Tol. Eḷuttu uyir* 45. 84) by which they either end in *ikāra* or *ai kāra* or in closed labial '*m*'. Thus we know that Aśvini, Bharaṇi, Rōhiṇi, Svāti, Pūraṭṭādi (Pūrva-bhādrapada), Uttiraṭṭādi (Uttara-bhādrapada) and Rēvati end in *ikāra* while Kārttikai (Krittikā), Ādira (Ārdrā), Cittirai (Citrā) and Kēṭṭai (Jyeṣṭhā) end in *ai kāra.* The rest end in closed '*m*'.

There were regular time-keepers appointed by kings who kept time measured by the sun-dial as well as the hour-glass and announced it by the hour. As in the time division, we had the science of numbers, weights and measures. There was the regular practice of group discussions and seminars where the learned gave exposition of special arts and sources of knowledge. Even the manner in which such discourses took place when the speakers used the finger signs appropriate to their sentiments is described (*Malai.* 112–113). It was often the practice for debaters to raise their own intellectual banner and challenge others to defeat them in bouts of knowledge (*Paṭṭinam.* 169–171).

The Tamils of the Śaṅgam period were certainly discerning connoisseurs of good life, fine sentiment, expert knowledge and healthy traditions. The multifaceted character of their daily life, where all the elements of gracious living, unaccompanied by ostentation but certainly accompanied by nobility, self-respect, aesthetic perception, arid intellectual hunger, were present in generous measure. The arts, crafts and sciences that were known to them were not of the incipient or rudimentary kind, as are found in the original regions of their inception or invention but of a well-co-ordinated and integrated character, well seeped in their cultural matrix. It does not require great skill to note that such a state of affairs presupposes a considerable period of assimilation or even juxtaposition of the local and extraneous cultural groups. The fusion of these on the sociological plane, though not as much on the linguistic and ethnic, had become such a happy phenomenon that indigenous traditions and folklore were given a new look, by the urbanisation of society, and extraneous traditions were given a local habitation and a name. Well and truly had the greater and lesser traditions of the participants commingled to produce a harmonization. This cross-fertilization, as it were, of the intellectual and economic geniuses of the coalescing groups had indeed been responsible for their rejuvenation. Tamil culture, particularly as reflected in the Śaṅgam classics, was not a unitary, monolithic entity. It was, by and large, the flowering of a social group, whose earlier processes of germination and budding belong to its prehistory and protohistory and spread over a large part of India.

CHAPTER VI

IDEALS AND EXEMPLARS

In the foregoing chapters, we have been dealing at some length with the life, daily habits, arts and cults of the Śaṅgam age. It would be pretty clear from the fund of material at our disposal that we have a picture of a robust society, which lived a full life, replete with glamour, valour, piety and nobility. Such a people would certainly have had before them shining ideals which they highly cherished, and exemplars of the same among them whom they revered. Time and again in these classics we run into open or allusive references to great ideals that were shaping the society, and to their worthy practitioners. We shall now close with an assessment and appreciation of these ideals and their practitioners. For, in the ultimate analysis, we would have to judge the whole society of early Tamils, not so much by their material possessions, nor by their political status, but by the ideals to which they had unmistakably dedicated themselves, notwithstanding the varying degree of success achieved therein. It would seem to a sympathetic student of the Śaṅgam literature that the ethical, moral and spiritual virtues that were formulated by the exemplars in society were not theoretical or above reach but were indeed an inevitable code of social behaviour for the people, if they are not to reduce life to a purposeless rigmarole of enjoyment and decay. The virtues and gracious qualities that were inculcated by the elders, Brahmins, poets and ascetics, into royalty and laity alike, in those ages, were the real sheet-anchor on which the stamina of the society and its genius for a perpetual regeneration of these values, were based. Let us now hear the bards of the Śaṅgam age on this social etiquette.

The ideals of the people were governed by the *puruṣārthas* or the goals set up for man in his journey through life. They are right conduct, knowledge and *Dharma*, acquisition of wealth and perquisites for leading a well-ordered life for the family and self, enjoyment of the aesthetic and artistic aspects of life itself for deriving full satisfaction out of the life lived and so much loved : and finally the incipient stage of liberation from this world of bondage and attachment to an yet higher world of spiritual oneness with God, for perennial

bliss. Leaving the last mentioned, the other three, *aṟam* (*Dharma*), *poruḷ* (*artha*) and *inbam* (*kāma*) were the different aspects of a man's life. The first of these was undoubtedly the most precious and the most basic for a proper evaluation and dispensation of the other two. How subtle is the adherence to *Dharma* is well brought out by the utterance of the poet Paraṇar, addressing Pēhan, who had forsaken his wife. The poet says: "Oh king, you, who had been so meticulous about the show of kindness to even the lesser order of beings like the jungle peacock, to which you gave your shawl, for warding off its cold, have not shown that same solicitude to your own wife." Stung to the quick by this exposition, Pēhan was again united with his queen.

A commonly held view of the Śaṅgam classics on love is that they extol romantic love which is requited mutually and which rises spontaneously in the lover and the beloved. The early Tamil poets differentiated between base sensual desire and deep love, but they have equally well underscored the keen desire of the lover and the beloved to live unitedly without ever separating from each other. This is indeed the ultimate ideal even in married or sacramental love and had actually been well appreciated as such. While it was fully realised that the transient period of youth called for the best enjoyment of its burning passions consistently with decorum and decency, it was equally well understood that there is something deeper in life partnership between husband and wife, than mere gestures of romantic love and physical enjoyment. Indeed, the ardent prayer of the beloved was that in every birth, she should be born as the beloved of the chosen lover, so that the continuity of their mutual attachment remains perpetual (*Kuṟun.* 49 : 3–5 ; *Pari.* 11 : 138–139). It is such a long-lasting and heart-to-heart bond of affection that was glorified by the Śaṅgam poets as the true love (*kādal*). The fact that the man and his beloved wanted this deep love to be consistent throughout one's life, notwithstanding the passing away of youth, is indicative of the fundamental values of kinship they attached to it. Even in the differentiation between *kāma* which is physical love and *kādal* which is platonic love, they have evolved some niceties like *nāṇam* or a becoming shyness which would make the lover or the beloved desist from doing anything that is brazen, blatant, shameful or shocking to one's sense of propriety (*Kuṟun.* 149 : 1–6). Indeed,

it was fully realised that if there is excessive degree of *kāma* between lover and beloved, it tends to destroy verily the sacred bond of love existing between the two (*Naṟṟ*. 39 : 1–3). Thus, disciplined love was fully appreciated even on the romantic plane. It was considered that destiny brings together men and women of identical and complementary feelings, and by instilling love between them, develops it into the state of marriage. Tolkāppiyar lists 10 qualities which are to be found in such ideal pairs of lovers, and 10 obstacles which will try to distract and damage such mutual and unqualified love (*Tol. Poruḷ. Mei*. 25–26). It is not necessary to state that in the early Tamil society, clandestine love between a male and a female was not only common but was not frowned upon normally. As a matter of fact, having looked down upon seeking of sensual pleasures from a courtezan or a prostitute, the elders would certainly have done well not to decry even natural budding love or affection between decent youths in society (*Kuriñji*. 21–22). Such love and even its logical consummation called '*kaḷavu maṇam*' or 'stolen love and marriage' by Tamil poets was a settled feature of the social group. Correspondingly, the open type of marriage and post-marital love was called '*kaṟpu*'—a word which has become synonymous with chastity in Tamil language. This does not certainly mean that the consummation of clandestine love was unchaste, but that the elders felt the danger of its going off the rails sometimes. However, we find a liberal sentiment that inasmuch as a girl can have her heart only for one man or one youth, they are averse to marrying more than once (*Kali*. 114: 19–21). This would mean, on the one hand, that girls generally chose, along with their parents, a most suitable husband for themselves and gave their whole heart to him after marriage, and on the other, they did not marry again after they were either deserted or widowed. That the husband is the very light of the wife's life is well adumbrated (*Aiṅgu*. 405 ; 1–2 ; *Aham*. 352 : 8–9). Love, modesty, courtesy, chastity, nobility and hospitality were the virtues most prized in a wife (*Tol. Poruḷ. Kaṟpu* 11 : 1–4).

The exemplary ideal of chastity shown to young married girls, was Arundhatī, the wife of Vaśiṣṭha, and fixed on the constellation of the Great Bear (*Puṟam*. 122 : 8 ; *Peṟum* 302–303 ; *Kali*. 2 : 21). The elemental and compelling power of a woman's unsullied chastity was such that it can cause rain at will (*Kali*. 16 : 20). We know that

the post-Saṅgam work *Silappadikāram* is nothing but an ode to the glory of the Tamil woman's chastity. Such a chastity which keeps itself within its bounds, even under dire provocation, is called a righteous chastity (*aṛakkaṛpu*) and is of the highest order.

A full enjoyment of family life is not complete without progeny. Children make a house most pleasant and fruitful. Poets spoke to kings about the need for children not only for carrying on the family or dynastic name, but also to offer obsequies to their departed parents; children were thus highly prized (*Puṛam* 9 : 3–4). Performance of water oblations or *tarpaṇa* was thus a well-known rite in those days, and the departed manes were believed to reside in the southern quarter of the globe (universe) after death. To bring up a child and make him a good, honest and decent citizen is a great responsibility of the parents (*Puṛam* 312 : 1–2).

Friendship was considered a token of one's breeding. Friendship, regardless of rewards or return, was held so high that the poet Piśirāndaiyār was ready almost to identify his great friend Kōpperuñ-chōḷa's name with his own name, and when the latter was 'resting on the north' on an austerity-till-death ritual, he said true friends, though they may not meet during a period of prosperity, will unfailingly meet in adversity (*Puṛam* 215 : 8–9). True friendship was considered to be without any real element of separation or dislike, and was compared to the mythical bird (Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa) with two heads but only one body (*Aham*. 82 : 4–5). Friendship, truly speaking, once contracted never got severed (*Kuṛun*. 313 : 4–5). The art of friendship was cultivated so seriously that its failings and strength were well understood. The false friends who exploited the frankness of true friendship were duly abhorred. In fact, it was said that wise men strike up a friendship only after they have fully studied the nature of those whom they befriend, and not adopt the other way round, of studying them after becoming friends (*Naṛṛ*. 32 : 8–9). This is particularly so, because they felt that ending a friendship once developed was a very sad and painful thing.

A poet goes to the extent of describing the true friend as one who, wittingly, would accept a cup of poison offered by his friend,

having full faith in the friend. Such friends are called *ṇāgarikas* (civilized persons) (*Naṟṟ*. 355 : 6–7).

Respect to elders and wise men was another well-practised virtue. These wise men (*śānṟōr*) were well read, of subdued personality, kind heart, endearing gestures, ever interested in the good of others, ever shunning evil acts and thoughts, shy to accept compliments and gentle in manners (*Naṟṟ* 233 : 7–9 ; 72 : 1–2 ; *Kuṟun*. 252 : 6–8). When such elders are seen, good people offer their salutations in *añjali* pose (*Śiṟupāṇ* 23) and seek wholesome counsel from them (*Madurai*. 192–194). They were the custodians and the guarantors of virtue and righteousness in society. Since character and integrity once lost can never be regained, unlike a gold ornament which once broken can again be mended and joined, a close vigil was kept on the doings of kings and commoners alike by these wise and learned and godly men, and their advice was received with the respect it deserved (*Kuṟiñji*. 13–18). Thus, all the acts, speech and thoughts that were a slur on individual and society were shunned vigorously and deliberately, thanks to the presence in society of the wise elders. Adherence to truth was particularly considered as one of the eminent virtues, and is glorified and held up as a shining ideal (*Madurai*. 19–20). Gratitude was another such which comes for frequent honour and praise at the hands of the poets and patrons. Ingratitude was considered as one of the deadly sins, the others being cutting the udders of a cow, abortion and doing ill to the Brahmins (*Puṟam* 34 : 1–7). Return-help for any deep obligations to anybody was deemed quite essential, failure of which was taken as liable to affect the progeny of the indebted (*Kali*. 149 : 6–7).

Poverty, particularly in youth, was considered as a curse, and the married life of poor people was taken as worse than outright begging. It was realised that laziness or sloth was at the root of poverty. He who is industrious and has a sense of mission, would keep himself and his family happy and prosperous. A keen desire to work for the betterment of one's own family would be the panacea for removing soul-killing poverty.

Resolution was another virtue extolled. It would be miserable to rue an act after it has been committed. It would be wise to consider the pros and cons of a deed well before it is executed. Neidalaṅ-

gānal Iḷañjēṭcenni came in for great and worthy praise, mainly because of his estimable quality of never regretting after committing an act (*Puṟam* 10 : 11–12). Good actions of wise people, even while seeming to attract odium from their detractors, will be proved as beneficial in due course, resulting in the odium turning into unstinted praise, thus indicating the basic integrity of wise men's deeds.

Another trait that received its meed of praise from the poets of the Śaṅgam age was industry. Manual labour and industriousness in the pursuit of a chosen objective by fair means, were considered as suggesting the honesty of an individual. Wise men refuse to beg or supplicate before men for providing them succour, even when falling on the darkest days of adversity. They keep themselves up by dint of their own productive actions. It is said that even when led to seek assistance from their own close relatives, good men would hesitate to spell out their helpless position, and would be ashamed to be placed in such a position and show it by making only appropriate gestures (*Kali.* 61 : 2–6). Patrons particularly took the initiative in rendering help to the wise but indigent men, obviating the situation wherein the seeker of help is embarrassed (*Pari.* 10 : 87–88). Neḍuñjēralādan was one such, and the poet Kumaṭṭūr Kaṇṇanār declares that in delivering him to the world, the king's mother had done an act of purification of her womb (*Padiṟṟ.* 20 : 21–27). Similar was Pēhan's munificence and Āy's magnanimity (*Puṟam* 134 : 1–4). A simple yet elegant sentiment is also expressed in the *Puṟam* passage (196 : 1–8) which opines that giving whatever one can easily gift away and properly excusing oneself regarding the limit of one's helpfulness are very endearing qualities; while making false and empty promises beyond one's own reach or competence, and not giving even what little one can very well donate, are despicable traits. The exemplars of patronage like Tōyan Māṟan and Neḍuñjeḷiyan of Talaiyālaṅgāam fame are praised in this regard (*Puṟam* 180: 1–2; *Aham* 53 : 13–16; *Puṟam* 72 : 17–18). The sweet and hospitable behaviour towards those who seek help is itself an estimable virtue, and Neḍumān Añji is extolled for this (*Puṟam.* 101 : 1–3) and similarly Piṭṭaṅkoṟṟan is pointed out to others as the source of consistent and responsive munificence. The pride with which donors without largeness of heart were shunned is also indicated by Peruñcittiranār's repartee to the chieftain Iḷaveḷimān

(*Puṛam.* 207). The seven great patrons such as Pēhan, Pāri, Kāri, Āy, Adigan, Naḷḷi and Ōri had gone into legend with their discerning and self–effacing succour. Pāri left away his chariot in the jungle, so that the *mullai* (jasmine) creeper may have its support. Pēhan gave a shawl to protect a peacock from the cold. Āy gave all his elephants to those who wanted them and the elephant stable became a meeting place of peacocks. His queens had no ornaments on their persons except the *māṅgalya sūtra*, and yet his palace was more welcome and hospitable than those of all other chiefs (*Puṛam.* 127). Naḷḷi gave away his all to a stranger in the forest without even caring to publicise himself. These were the ideals that enthused and gladdened the hearts of bards.

The ethics of doing good to others was again and again emphasised. It was pointed out that doing good, one ascends to heaven ultimately, and even in this world it repays him in his lean days. (*Puṛam* 213 : 20–24). Many proverbs were floated for inculcating virtues. It was explained that the world is full of joy as well as sorrows, these alternating like day and night, light and shadow, birth and death, union and separation, prosperity and adversity (*Aham* 327 : 1–6). No one knows or has ever claimed to know what would be the life-span of an individual (*Naṛṛ.* 314 : 1–2). Hence, in this life, which like a dream or drama quickly passes before our very eyes, and where blooming youth turns into irksome infirmity, and beauty fades so quickly and consistently as the phases of the moon over a month, it is all the more urgent that one should accumulate the good effects of virtuous actions, kindness and piety. It was urged that those who do not follow the righteous code of conduct have not realised the significance of the evolution of man (*Kali.* 38 : 18–24).

Having said so much about the discipline of domestic and public life of a family man, the poets expatiate upon the virtues of detachment, asceticism and saintliness. It is not easy to give up worldly attachment and family ties much as one may talk idly about it (*Puṛam* 193). It was said that those who have achieved the detached spirit are not ignored by the goddess of prosperity. It was also held that the truly emancipated souls do not have to follow the laws of

death to leave their morral coil. They would do it whenever they decide about it (*Kali*. 138 : 29–31). The Śaṅgam age certainly knew also about pretenders to asceticism, hypocritical saints, and these are called those 'whose powers perish' (*Pari*. 5 : 71–77) and the true saints were called *mādavar*. For such impeccable detachment, one has to have performed meritorious acts even in previous births and it is certainly to be attained only by God's own grace and benedictions, as asserted by Nalleḻuniyār, while glorifying Viṣṇu (*Pari*. 13 : 60-64). Tolkāppiyar also urges that detachment is good for every family man, at the close of his life (*Tol. Kaṛpu* 51).

People had a deep belief in 'fate' or 'destiny' which was called *ūḷ*. They even looked upon fate as a god (*Tol. Śoḷ. Kiḷavi* 58) on much the same analogy as *vidhi*, a synonym of Brahmā, the creator, who is said to mark out each man's fate on his forehead. Every major or minor event in one's life is said to have been thus pre-ordained, as mentioned by Tolkāppiyar himself (*Tol. Kaḷavu* 2). Kaṇiyan Pūnkunṟan states that life follows the destined route, in much the same way as an object floats in the direction of the current of water (*Puṟam* 192 : 8–11). This fate was classified into beneficial fate as well as evil fate. All happiness, pleasure and good events were taken as caused by the good fate, while sorrow and cruel events were the acts of evil fate (*Puṟam* 236 : 10–12). Thus, the consensus of the outlook was that fate was difficult of transgression, but good actions always beget good results and thus it was incumbent on every one, in his own interests and in order to confront fate, to have a fund of good deeds and pious actions and meritorious achievements, so that, if not in this birth, at least in the next, their lives would be well-ordered.

Among the evils of society, the institutions of entertainment—girls and courtezans, were considered as of great debilitating force. No doubt, they were not destroyed because their role in society was certainly more economical than social, and their fundamental acquisitions such as the arts of music and dance were of a commendable order, and were a way of preserving these traditions. But nobody had any illusions about the highly unreliable and tricky nature of the harlot's heart. In a similar way gambling was considered as a great vice and was looked down upon in decent circles.

The monarchical system of government certainly called for a direct relationship between the ruler and the ruled, and thus it was all the more essential that the king, being a visible symbol of righteousness, integrity and nobility, had to be very cautious in keeping up a high standard of conduct. Indeed, it would be more than clear that the king had to consider the entire kingdom as one large family and share intimately and personally all their joys and sorrows, and be ever a source of inspiration to them. Such an outlook resulted in the subjects never having any real sense of alarm or disturbance during periods of wars. They stood solidly by their king and did not sell away their integrity for a mess of pottage from the enemy king, nor was the king himself ever forgetful of their close kinship with him, and the need for his preserving that image during periods of stress particularly. Thus the ideals and exemplars were both of an open character, resulting in the daily life being taken seriously, and the social ethos was well stabilised and on safe moorings. Certainly the most influential among the wise men who guided the minds of kings and men were the godly men and the sages. These were *aṟivar*, *arundavar* and *śānṟōr*; of these, the second-mentioned were known by many names like *munivar*, *aiyar*, *tapasiyar*, *andaṇar* etc. They usually lived on involuntarily received alms; they were always on the move (*Kuṟun.* 273 : 3; *Aiṅg.* 84 : 1). They were said to have had occult powers to shift from one place to another. They were completely detached from this worldly activities. They had conquered both fear and hatred. The *aṟivar* were usually ascetics who carry the *tridaṇḍa* and wear saffron robes and were found in acts of penance. Whoever went to them were furnished with wholesome counsel for their worldly conduct (*Mullai.* 237 : 40; *Kali.* 9L 1–4). They were also called '*mēlōr*', the great people, Similar to these were the *śānṟōr*, who were the embodiment of rectitude and piety.

Such was indeed the prestige of these wise men, who had nothing to fear and protect, except evil and goodness respectively, that irrespective of the kingdom in which they were to be found, that land was held as the most glorious by virtue of their very presence there (*Puṟam.* 187).

It would be only appropriate to add that notwithstanding the high ideals that were held in the proud bosom of the Saṅgam Tamils,

the matter of the royal practice of the same could not be expected to be consistently commendable. It was well known that the triple kingdoms of Tamilnāḍ, namely, of the Chēras, Pāṇḍyas and Chōḷas were ever locked in internecine, if only competitive, wars and feuds, and might was, by far, the best arbiter of right on the mundane or political plane. Indeed, it was taken as axiomatic that this state of affairs was implied in *Rājanīti* or State craft (*Puṟam* 76 : 1–2). It was an uphill task undertaken with missionary spirit, by the wise men to bring harmony and solidarity, against odds, among the triple Tamil kings. The poet Kārikkaṇṇanār of Kāvērippaṭṭinam went into raptures when the Chōla king Perumtirumāvaḷavan and the Pāṇḍya Peruvaḷudi were united and friendly, and compared their relationship to that between Balarāma and Kriṣṇa, and held out a hope that they would be ever united and their emblems would be engraved together in all places (*Puṟam* 58 : 1). On the other hand, when Chōḷa Nalaṅkiḷḷi and Chōla Neḍuṅkiḷḷi who were born in the same dynasty and lineage, had fallen out and Neḍuṅkiḷḷi was put under siege within the fortress at Uṟaiyūr, Kōvūr Kiḷār the poet was pained to witness this break in the self-same family, and tried his level best to bring about a conciliation between the two, by appropriate wise counsel, and by asserting that if the victory or defeat of either is equally well that of the other, such friction is indecent among kings of the same land.

Thus, despite the fact that even in the same land or same region or same community or same family, speaking the same language, there were factors of disruption and dislike, and even true elements of disparity, the wise men always emphasised the points of unity, or similarity, in order to establish concord. Indeed the sense of oneness or unity they inculcated was not delimited by mundane frontiers but extended beyond the kingdom, the language and community, and was upheld as a universally valid precept. The spirit which would make a man feel at home at any place, and to be in terms of kinship with people of diverse habits, customs and regions, was considered as an ideal worth striving for. Thus, welded, the people shared the national joys, and sorrows, looked upon all men as equal and lived a cohesive and mutually responsive life. This universality of ideal and spirit is verily paraphrased by poet Kaṇian Pūṅguṉṟanār (*Puṟam* 192).

It was a random vignette of the Saṅgam classics, but its sentiment is found permeating the extensive compass of the whole literature, society and land, and it is this coalescence of thought, emotion and action in the variegated peoples of the ancient Tamilnāḍ of the Saṅgam Age that was to be the mirror for the future.

There was no aspect of life or station in life or type of human kind that has not been touched by the ethical reach of the Saṅgam anthologies. Indeed, it would seem that their very purpose was not so much to mirror the extant society of the times, but to envision the permanent elements that would safeguard and enrich the problematic future. The robust commonsense, the shrewd perception of man and nature, the self-effacing spirit of plain-living and high thinking, the play of artless and rancourless emotions and passions so vividly displayed by the Tamil kings and so ably portrayed by the Saṅgam poets, would be the pride of any country and people. That the Tamils had such a literature goes to show the realistic character of their making; their genius for mingling with others and assimilation of their traditions and culture; their close kinship with mother-earth particularly, which made them fuse with every heart-beat of nature, and with every colour and texture of the fauna and flore; their outspokenness and extrovert character which made them praise as heartily as they criticise harshly one and all; and above all, their great powers of imagination and literary talent that could produce some of the best traits in tribal and social literature, which, though admittedly not providing a historiographic account despite the plethora of personal and place names, have certainly been the most glorious, and one of the most ancient sagas of any people come down to us. It was destined to be immortal.